# Unfrequented France

M. Betham-Edwards

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# UNFREQUENTED FRANCE

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MONTPELLIER-LE-VIEUX

[*Frontispiece*

# UNFREQUENTED FRANCE

## *BY RIVER AND MEAD AND TOWN*

BY

MISS BETHAM-EDWARDS

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE DE FRANCE

"France! oh, belle contrée; oh, terre généreuse."
A. CHÉNIER

"Would that we two were maying . . .
O'er river and mead and town."
C. KINGSLEY

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# PREFATORY

An apology for this volume is not necessary. Despite the dozens, scores, I am tempted to say hundreds, of books written about France within the last decade (in other words, since the inauguration of the *entente cordiale*), the regions here described, for the most part, have been passed by.

The unique and ancient citadel of Provins in the Brie, Besançon and its magnificent scenery, the highlands of Franche-Comté and forests of the Jura, the idyllic scenes around Dijon, the descent of the Rhône, perhaps the finest trip by river in Europe, the rapids of the Tarn, the dolomite city of Montpellier-le-Vieux, the savage grandeur of the Causses—triple marvels first made known to English and, by acknowledgment, to French readers by my own pen (see M. Martel's *Les Cévennes*)—the curious Ile de Ré, an hour and a half from beautiful La Rochelle, the lovely banks of the Erdre and of the Loire between Nantes and Angers, lastly, the Pays Vendéan and Pays Angevin, historic, romantic, and attaching nooks and corners of the Vendée and of Anjou—few and far between are the English travellers found zigzagging amid these scenes, none throughout France more amply repay a visit. Many of the spots here described are inaccessible by railway; in others, since my



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wanderings, iron roads have been laid. As far as possible, the wise traveller will follow my example and stick to diligence and calèche, steamer, barge and boat, in other words, selecting the slowest possible means of locomotion.

I beg most gratefully to acknowledge the courtesy of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett, also of the Macmillan Company for allowing copious extracts from my *Holidays in Eastern France* and *The Roof of France:* both works long since out of print. I add that all passages culled from those volumes have undergone careful revision, and that neither of them are included in the Tauchnitz series; also that although numerous detached portions have been translated into French and issued in French periodicals, no entire translation has been brought out.

As will be surmised, the long and wide apart journeys here put together were not made at a stretch; they cover, indeed, many years, but I have linked the various stages so as to make of the zig-zaggeries a sequent and easily followed round.

MATILDA BETHAM-EDWARDS.

*August* 8, 1910.

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# PART I

# FROM PARIS TO BESANÇON AND LYONS

CANAL SCENE

[*To face p. 2*

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# CHAPTER I

## THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE MARNE TO PROVINS

Not many travellers on the great Mulhouse railway zigzag to the ancient little city of Provins; none throughout that splendid hexagon called France are worthier of a visit.

On the way thither many a village and townling offer delightful summer retreats.

My own rallying point was a country house at Couilly, near Esfly, offering every opportunity of studying rural life, and facilities for excursions by boat, diligence and railway. Couilly is charming. The canal, winding its way between thick lines of poplar trees towards Meaux, you may follow in the hottest day of summer without fatigue. The river, narrow and sleepy, yet so picturesquely curling amid green slopes and tangled woods, affords another delicious stroll; then there are broad, richly-wooded hills rising above these, and shady side-paths leading from hill to valley, with alternating vineyards, orchards, pastures and cornfields on either side. It lies in the heart of the cheese-making country, part of the ancient province of Brie from which this famous cheese is named.

The Comté of Brie became part of the French kingdom on the occasion of the marriage of Jeanne of Navarre with Philip-le-Bel in 1361, and is as

prosperous as it is picturesque. It also possesses historic interest. Within a stone's throw of our garden wall once stood a famous convent of Bernardines, called Pont-aux-Dames. Here Madame du Barry, the favourite of Louis XV, was exiled after his death. On the outbreak of the Revolution, she flew to England, having first concealed, somewhere in the Abbey grounds, a valuable case of diamonds. The Revolution went on its way, and Madame du Barry might have ended her unworthy career in peace had not a sudden fit of cupidity induced her to return to Couilly when the Terror was at its acme, in quest of her diamonds. The Committee of Public Safety got hold of Madame du Barry, and unheroically she mounted the guillotine. What became of the diamonds, history does not say. The Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames has long since been turned to other purposes, but the beautiful old-fashioned garden at the time of my visit remained intact.

Like most of the ancient villages in the Seine et Marne, Couilly possesses a church of an early period, though unequal in interest to those of its neighbours. It is also full of reminiscences of the Franco-German War. My friend's house was occupied by the German Commandant and his staff, who, however, committed no depredations beyond carrying off blankets and bedquilts, a pardonable offence considering the arctic winter.

Coulommiers possesses little interest beyond its old church and a very pretty walk by the winding river, but it is worth making the two hours' drive across country for the sake of the scenery. I

gladly accepted a neighbour's offer of a seat in his trap, a light spring-cart with capital horse. He was a butcher, and, like the rest of the world here, wore the convenient and cleanly blue cotton trousers and blue blouse of the country. The spare seat was occupied by a notary, the two men discussing metaphysics, literature, and the origin of all things, on their way.

We started at seven o'clock in the morning, and lovely indeed looked the wide landscape in the tender light—valley, winding river, and wooded ridge being soon exchanged for wide open spaces covered with corn and root crops. Farming here is carried on extensively, some of these rich farms numbering several hundred acres. Farmhouses and buildings all surrounded with a high stone wall, are few and far between, and the separate harvests cover much larger tracts than at Couilly. It was market-day and we passed by many farmers and farmeresses jogging to the town, the latter in comfortable covered carts, with their fruit and vegetables, eggs and butter.

Going to market in France means, indeed, what it did with ourselves a hundred years ago; the farmers and farmers' wives looking the picture of prosperity. In some cases fashion had already so far got the better of tradition, that the reins were handled by a smart-looking lady in hat and feathers and fashionable dress, but for the most part by toil-embrowned, homely women, having a coloured handkerchief twisted round their heads, and no pretension to gentility. The men, one and all, wore blue blouses, and were evidently accustomed to hard

work, but, it was easy to see, possessed both means and intelligence. Like the rest of the Briard population, they are fine fellows, tall, with regular features and frank, good-humoured countenances.

With many other towns in these parts, Coulommiers dates from an ancient period, and long belonged to the English crown. Ravaged during the Hundred Years' War, the religious wars, and the troubles of the League, nothing to speak of remains of its old walls and towers of defence. Indeed, except for the drive thither across country, and the fruit and cheese markets, it possesses no temptations for sojourners. Market day, however, is ever a sight for a painter. The show of melons alone makes a subject; the weather-beaten market-women, with gay-coloured head-gear, their blue gowns, the delicious colour and lovely form of the fruit, all this must be seen to be realized. Here and there were large pumpkins, cut open to show the ripe, red pulp, with abundance of purple plums, apples and pears just ripening, and bright yellow apricots. At Coulommiers, as elsewhere, I looked in vain for rags, dirt, or a sign of beggary. Every one seemed rich, independent and happy.

Another day we visited Meaux. The diligence passed our gate early in the morning, in an hour and a half reaching the capital of the ancient Brie, bishopric of the famous Bossuet, and one of the early strongholds of the Reformation! The neighbouring country, *Pays Meldois* as it is called, is one vast fruit and vegetable garden, bringing in enormous returns. From our vantage ground—for, of course, we were in the *coupé*—with delight we

VALLEY OF THE MARNE

[*To face p.* 6

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surveyed the shifting landscape, wood, valley and plain, soon seeing the city with its imposing cathedral, flashing like marble high above the winding river and fields of green and gold on either side. I know nothing that gives the mind an idea of fertility and wealth more than such a scene. No wonder that the Prussians, in 1871, here levied a heavy toll, their occupation of Meaux having cost the inhabitants not less than a million and a half of francs. All is now peace and prosperity, and here, as in the neighbouring towns, rags, want and beggary are not found. The evident well-being of all classes is delightful to behold.

Meaux, with its shady boulevards and pleasant public gardens, must be an agreeable place to live in, nor would intellectual resources be wanting. We strolled into the spacious town library, open, of course, to all strangers, and could wish for no better occupation than to con the curious old books and the manuscripts that it contains. The Bishop's Palace is the great sight of the city. Here have halted a long string of historic personages, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette when on their return from Varennes, June 24, 1791; Napoleon in 1814; Charles X in 1828; later, General Moltke in 1870, who said upon that occasion—

"In three days, or a week at most, we shall be in Paris," not counting on the possibilities of a siege.

The room occupied by the unfortunate Louis XVI and his little son, still bears the name of *La Chambre du Roi.* The gardens, designed by Le Nôtre, are magnificent and very quaint, as quaint and characteristic, perhaps, as any of the same

period; a broad, open, sunny flower-garden below; above, terraced walks so shaded with closely-planted plane-trees that the sun can hardly penetrate them on this July day. These green walks, where the nightingale and the oriole made music, were otherwise as quiet as the Évêché itself; but the acme of tranquillity and solitude was only to be found in the avenue of yews, called Bossuet's Walk. Here it is said the great orator used to pace backwards and forwards when composing his famous discourses.

If one of the most prosperous, Meaux is also one of the most liberal of French cities, and has been renowned for its charity from early times. In the thirteenth century there were no fewer than sixty Hôtels-Dieu, as well as hospitals for lepers, in the diocese, and at the present day it is true to its ancient traditions, being abundantly supplied with hospitals.

Half-an-hour from Meaux by railway is the pretty little town of La Ferté-sous Jouarre, picturesquely perched on the Marne, famous for its millstones, but not yet rendered unpoetic by the hum and bustle of commerce.

Here again we are reminded of the terrible journey from Varennes.

In a lovely little island within bowshot of the bridge stands the so-called Château de l'Île, a seventeenth-century manor house, much dilapidated at the time of my visit, and with associations quite out of keeping with its radiant surroundings.

Here on their way to Meaux, for a few hours only rested the adust-weary and despairing travellers. The balcony used to be shown, on which the poor

little dauphin amused himself with fishing in the river below whilst his parents reposed in an adjoining room. Portions of the building were also open to visitors, these containing Gobelin's tapestries, but already the château had been divided into three tenements.

The twin town of Jouarre is reached by a beautiful drive of an hour. Ah, how happy were wayfarers in France before its grand roads—so many boulevards when not rustic causeways—were rendered pestiferous by the dust and odour of the motor!

Leaving the river, we ascend gradually, gaining at every step a richer, wider prospect; below, the bright blue Marne, winding amid green reaches; above, a ridge of wooded monticles, hamlets peeping above golden corn and luxuriant foliage.

The love of flowers and gardens, so painfully absent in the west of France, is here conspicuous. There are flowers everywhere, and some of the little gardens give evidence of great skill and care. Jouarre is perched upon an airy green height and is a quiet old-world town with an enormous convent in the centre, where some scores of cloistered nuns have shut themselves up for the glory of God. There, at the time I write of, lived these Bernardines, as much in prison as the most dangerous felons ever brought to justice; and a prison-house, indeed, the place looked, with its high walls, bars and bolts.

Close to this relic of the Middle Ages—maybe now vanished—is to be seen one of the most curious monuments in this department, namely the famous

Merovingian crypt. During that *régime*, long journeys were often undertaken in order to procure marbles and other building materials for the Christian churches. Thus only can we account for the splendid columns of jasper, porphyry, and other rare marbles of which this crypt is composed. The capitals of white marble, in striking contrast to the deep reds, greens, and other colours of the columns, are richly carved with acanthus leaves, scrolls, and other classic patterns, without doubt the whole having originally decorated some Pagan temple. The chapel containing the crypt is said to have been founded in the seventh century and speaks much for the enthusiasm and artistic spirit animating its builders. There is considerable elegance in these arches, also in the sculptured tombs of different epochs, which, like the crypt, have been wonderfully preserved until the present time. Another archæological treasure is the so-called "Pierre des Sonneurs de Jouarre," or Stone of the Jouarre Bell-ringers, a most quaint design representing two bell-ringers at their task, with a legend underneath, dating from the fourteenth century.

It must be mentioned that the traveller's patience may undergo a trial here. When I arrived at Jouarre, M. le Curé and the sacristan were both absent, and as no one else possessed the key of the crypt, my chance of seeing it seemed small. However, some one obligingly set out on a voyage of discovery, and finally the sacristan's wife was found in a neighbouring harvest-field, and bustled up, delighted to show everything; amongst other antiquities, some precious skulls and bones of saints are

kept under lock and key in the sacristy, being only exhibited on fête days.

In the Middle Ages, Jouarre possessed an important abbey, which was destroyed during the Revolution.

This rich and important foundation, dating from the seventh century, consisting of religious houses for both sexes, at the head of which was ever a woman. The title of Abbess of Jouarre stood for all that was puissant, aristocratic, distinguished and, alike from a worldly and sacerdotal point of view, enviable. In his *Drames Philosophiques* Renan thus portrays the heroine of a hideous drama. "Ultra liberal in her views, possessed of a penetrating intellect, saintly as her forerunners and strong in faith as they, it was a pleasure to hear her discuss the problems of the epoch. Her beauty, heightened by the semi-conventual costume always worn in society, was an enchantment. Having once seen her and heard her discourse, the desire of a second interview became a thirst, a want, a veritable obsession." His abbess was the last, the communities being dispersed in 1789—a second Saint Fare or Saint Bathilde who had read Voltaire and annotated Rousseau.

# CHAPTER II

## PROVINS

"J'aime Provins . . .
"Les murs déserts qu' habitent les colombes
Et dont mes pas font trembler les débris."
HÉGÉSIPPE MOREAU.

AIRILY, coquettishly perched on its verdant height, still possessed of antique stateliness, and in striking contrast with the busy, trim little town below, mediæval Provins captivates the beholder by virtue of uniqueness and poetic charm. I can recall no place in my travels at all like this little Acropolis of Brie and Champagne, whether seen from a distance on the railway, or from the ramparts that still encircle it as in the golden time. Provins is indeed a gem; miniature Athens of a mediæval princedom that, although on a small scale, once boasted of great power and splendour; tiny Granada of these eastern provinces, bearing ample evidence of past literary and artistic glories.

We quit the main line at Longueville, and in a quarter of an hour come upon a vast panorama, crowned by the towers and dome of the still proud, defiant-looking little city, according to some writers the Agendicum of Cæsar's Commentaries, according to others, more ancient still. It is mentioned in the capitularies of Charlemagne, and in the Middle Ages was the important and flourishing capital of

Basse Brie and residence of the Counts of Champagne. Under Thibault VI, called Le Chansonnier, Provins reached its apogee of prosperity, numbering at that epoch 80,000 souls. Like most other towns in these parts, it suffered greatly in the Hundred Years' War, being taken by the English in 1432, and retaken from them in the following year. It took part in the League, but submitted to Henry IV in 1590, and from that time gradually declined; at present it numbers about 7,000 inhabitants only.

The rich red rose, commonly called Provence rose, is in reality the rose of Provins, having been introduced here by the Crusaders from the Holy Land. Gardens of this rose may still be found at Provins, though they are little cultivated now for commercial purpose; Provence, the land of the Troubadours, has therefore no claim whatever upon rose lovers, who are indebted instead to the airy little Acropolis of Champagne. In a poem its modern poet, Hégésippe Moreau, likens himself to "a cornflower growing amid the roses of Provins." Thus much for the history of the place, which has been chronicled by two gifted citizens of modern time, Opoix and Bourquelot.

It is difficult to give any idea of the citadel, so imposingly commanding the wide valleys and curling river at its foot. Leaving the Ville Basse, we climb for a quarter of an hour to find all the remarkable monuments of Provins within a stone's throw—the College, formerly Palace of the Counts of Champagne, the imposing Tour de César, the Basilica of St. Quiriace with its cupola, the famous *Grange aux*

*Dîmes*, the ancient fountain, lastly, the ruined city and gates and walls, called the Ville Haute. All these are close together, but conspicuously towering over the rest are the dome of St. Quiriace, and the picturesque, many pinnacled stronghold commonly known as Cæsar's Tower. These two crown, not only the ruins, but the vast landscape, with magnificent effect; the tower itself in reality having nothing to do with its popular name, the stronghold was built by a Count of Champagne. It is a picturesque object, with graceful little pinnacles connected by flying buttresses at each corner, and pointed tower surmounting all, from which proudly waves the Tricolour. A deaf and dumb girl led us through a little flower-garden into the interior, and took visitors up the winding stone staircase to the cells in which Louis d'Outremer and others are said to have been confined. For my own part, I prefer neither to go to the top nor bottom of things, neither to climb the Pyramids nor to penetrate into the Mammoth caves of Kentucky. I found it much more agreeable, and much less fatiguing, to view everything from the level, and this fine old structure is no exception to the rule. Nothing can be more picturesque than its appearance from the broken ground around, above, and below, and no less imposing is the quaint, straggling, indescribable old church of St. Quiriace close by, now a mere patchwork of different epochs, but in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries one of the most remarkable religious monuments in Brie and Champagne. Here was baptized Thibault VI, the song-maker, the lover of art, the patron of letters, and the

importer into Europe of the famous rose. Of Thibault's poetic creations an old chronicler wrote :

" C'était les plus belles chansons, les plus délectables et mélodieuses qui oncques fussent ouïses en chansons et instruments, et il les fit écrire en la salle de Provins et en celle de Troyes."

Close to this ancient church is the former palace of Thibault, now a secondary State school. Unfortunately, the director had gone off for his holiday, taking the keys with him—travellers never being looked for here—so that we could not see the interior and chapel. The building is superbly situated, commanding from the terrace a wide view of surrounding country. Perhaps, however, the most curious relics of ancient Provins are the vast and handsome subterranean chambers and passages, which are not only found in the *Grange aux Dîmes*, or Tithe Barn, but also under many private dwellings of ancient date.

Those who love to penetrate into the bowels of the earth may here visit cave after cave, subterranean chamber after chamber; some of these were used for the storage and introduction of supplies in time of war and siege, others may have served as crypts, for purposes of religious ceremony, also a harbour of refuge for priests and monks, lastly as workshops. Provins may therefore be called not only a town but a triple city, consisting, first, of the old; secondly, of the new; lastly, of the underground. Enchanting from an artistic and antiquarian point of view as are the first and last, all lovers of progress will not fail to give some time to

the modern part, not omitting the walls round the ramparts, before quitting the region of romance for plain matter of fact. At this elevation you have unbroken solitude and a wide expanse of open country; you also get a good idea of the commanding position of Provins.

A poetic halo still lingers round the rude times of Troubadour and Knight. The princelings of Brie and Champagne, who lived so jollily and regally in this capital of Provins, knew, however, how to grind down the people to the uttermost, and levied toll upon every imaginable pretext. The Jew had to pay them for his heresy, the assassin for his crime, the peasant for his produce, the artizan for his right to pursue a handicraft.

Now good feeling, peace, and prosperity prevail in this modern town, where alike are absent signs of great wealth or great poverty. I found myself in a region without a beggar.

Provins affords an excellent example of that spirit of decentralization so usual in France, and unhappily so rare among ourselves. Here in a country town, numbering between seven and eight thousand inhabitants only, we find all the resources of a capital on a small scale; Public Library, Museum, Theatre, learned societies. The Library contains some curious MSS. and valuable books. The Theatre was built by one of the richest and most generous citizens of Provins, M. Garnier, who may be said to have consecrated his ample fortune to the embellishment and advancement of his native town. Space does not permit an enumeration of the various acts of beneficence by which he has won the lasting

gratitude of his fellow-townsmen; at his death his charming villa, gardens, library, art and scientific collections becoming the property of the town. The Rue Victor Garnier has been appropriately named after this public-spirited citizen.

There are relics of antiquity to be found in the modern town also; nor have I given anything like a complete account of what is to be found in the old. No one who takes the trouble to diverge from the beaten track in order to visit this interesting little city—Weimar of the Troubadors—will be disappointed.

The latest poet of poetic Provins was no happy troubadour, fêted with royal welcome from château to château; instead a second and, if possible, unhappier Chatterton. Hégésippe Moreau, 1810–1838, ended his twenty-eight years of foiled ambition, want and loneliness on the bed of a public hospital. Left an orphan in early years, he became by turns journeyman printer, school-master, and editor of poor little newspapers. "What wanted he?" writes one of his editors. "Daily bread and affection. A poet whom a little measure of happiness might have changed, became the poet of hate."

Doubtless destiny was not all to blame, and in part, at least, his life was much as he made it. Could he have trusted more to his genius, a sure consolation had been at hand. In spite of many imperfections, his poems in collected form have quite recently been reprinted, whilst several lyrics are to be found in anthologies. He loved Provins, and has musically celebrated its little river, Le Voulzie, tributary of the Seine, which "with a murmur,

harmonious as its name, flows through flowery banks."

Despair, a vindictive attitude towards existence, characterized this nineteenth-century emulator of the troubadours, but grace and tenderness were not lacking in his works, as the following little poem shows :—

HAD I BUT KNOWN (Si j'avais su !)

Had I but known, when day by day,
Thy childish ardour urging on,
That thou wert soon to fade away,
Books, slate, and maps aside I'd thrown.
Had I but known !

With butterfly and bird and flower
Bright as their little lives, thy own,
By thee, each radiant summer hour
Mid woodland glories should have flown.
Had I but known !

And when December, gustful, made
Through snow-tipped boughs a dreary moan,
Mid piled-up toys thou shouldst have played,
A fairy prince upon his throne.
Had I but known !

Fictive, alas ! thy early bloom ;
For seven short years in promise grown,
Then wert thou summoned to the tomb,
And now I sit and sigh alone.
Had I but known !

## CHAPTER III

### TROYES AND DIJON

TROYES is rich in antiquities, but if hotels have not improved since my own visit many years ago, travellers would do well to crowd their sight-seeing into a day—or, better still, see only one thing, that wholly unforgettable. I allude to the lovely rood-screen in the church of St. Magdalene.

The city is cheerful with decorative bits of window-garden, abundance of flowers, hanging dormers, and much life animating its old and new quarters. The cathedral, which rises grandly from the monotonous fields of Champagne, just as Ely towers above the flat plains of our eastern counties, is also seen to great advantage from the quays; when approached you find it hemmed in with narrow streets. Its noble towers, surmounted by airy pinnacles, and splendid façade, delight the eye no less than the interior—gem of purest architecture blazing from end to end with rich old stained glass. No light here penetrates through the common medium, and the effect is magical; the superb rose and lancet windows, not dazzling, rather captivating the vision with the hues of the rainbow, being made up, as it seems, with no commoner materials than sapphire, emerald, ruby, topaz, amethyst, all these in the richest imaginable profusion. Other interiors are

more magnificent in architectural display, none are lovelier than this, and there is nothing to mar the general harmony, no gilding or artificial flowers, no ecclesiastical trumpery, no meretricious decoration. We find the glorious art of painting on glass in its perfection, and some of the finest in the cathedral, as well as in other churches here, are the work of a celebrated Troyen, Linard Gonthier.

A sacristan is always at hand to exhibit the treasury, worth, so it is said, some millions of francs, and which is to be commended to all lovers of jewels and old lace. The latter, richest old guipure, cannot be inspected by a collector without pangs. Such treasures as these, if not appropriated to their proper use, namely dress and decoration, should, at least, be exhibited in the local museum, where they might be seen and studied by the artistic. There are dozens of yards of this matchless guipure, but, of course, few eyes are ever rejoiced by the sight of it; and as I turned from one treasure to another, gold and silver ecclesiastical ornaments, carved ivory coffers, enamels, cameos, embroideries, inlaid reliquaries and tapestries, I was reminded of a passage in Victor Hugo's poem, *Le Pape*, wherein his ideal pontiff thus appeals to the Cardinals and Bishops in conclave—

"Prêtres, votre richesse est un crime flagrant,
Vos erreurs sont-ils méchants? Non, vos têtes sont dûres
Frères, j'avais aussi sur moi ce tas d'ordures,
Des perles, des onyx, des saphirs, des rubis,
Oui, j'avais sur moi, partout, sur mes habits,
Sur mon âme; mais j'ai vidé bien vîte
Chez des pauvres."

From the art-lover's point of view, Troyes, with so many other French towns, is all but inexhaustible. I will name only one *chef-d'œuvre* more, which is a haunting beauty to me after long years.

This is the famous *jubé*, or rood-loft, in the patchwork church of St. Madeleine; rather a curtain of delicatest lace cut out in marble, screen of transparent ivory or stalactite roof of fairy grotto! We notice nothing else but the airy creation, work of Juan de Gualde in the sixteenth century, and one of the richest of the period. As we gaze, the proportions of the interior seem to diminish, and we cannot help fancying that the church was built for the rood-loft, rather than the rood-loft for the church, so dwarfed is the latter by comparison. The centre aisle is indeed bridged over by a piece of stone-carving so exquisite in design, so graceful in detail, so airy and fanciful in conception, that we are with difficulty brought to realize its size and solidity. This unique rood-loft measures over six yards in depth, is proportionately long, and is symmetrical in every part, yet it looks as if a breath were only needed to disperse its delicate galleries, hanging arcades, and miniature vaults, gorgeous painted windows forming the background—jewels flashing through a veil of guipure.

If Troyes deserves a very long chapter to itself, Dijon merits a volume—one indeed I have oft-times longed to write.

Weeks and months, I may almost say, years, have been spent by me in my favourite French city, my *Lieblings Ort*, as Germans would say.

Leaving Dijon, historic, artistic and economic, to

Murray, Joanne and Baedeker, I will merely record a few impressions gathered in my walks, drives and picnics. The difficulty with me in writing of this region is to know where I should begin—and leave off!

Michelet, who described the beauty of his country-women as made up of little nothings, might have said the same of French scenery. Sweeter spots do not lie under the sun than are to be found in the Côte d'Or—yet how difficult, how all but impossible to describe them! You may look in vain for a mountain; no stupendous waterfalls magnetize travellers thither, lakes are wanting. But subtler, rarer loveliness is to be found by those who know in what direction to search. Behind the familiar vine-clad hills through which the incurious traveller is whirled by railway to French Switzerland, lie undreamed-of nooks—green, flowery, delicious. Within a walk even of the hot, dusty Burgundian capital, is many a cool forest resort, haunt of the hoopoe and the oriole; blue rivers flow amid emerald holms, and everywhere you have the sun and the vine. The chief characteristic consists in combes or narrow winding valleys, which are really as enticing as anything in Nature, all the more so here, because tourists have taken the trouble to find them out! Excepting, indeed, the unattainable Timbuctoo, or the North Pole itself, there is no spot in the wide world where the misanthropic Englishman would be almost certain to miss his country-folks.

What, however, would Burgundy be like without the vine? To accustomed eyes the vine, whether growing in the plain, on rocky hill-side, or trellised

as in Italy, must ever be one of the most beautiful things in the world. The just appreciable, yet never-to-be-forgotten fragrance of its flowers in early summer, the extraordinary luxuriance of its rich green, waxen-like leaves, its unrivalled fruit —alike the gold and the purple—are not more striking than the beauty of the foliage clothing slope and ridge. Especially on September afternoons, towards sunset, is the effect of a vineyard unforgettable. The leaves are then interpenetrated with warm golden light, and whilst the edges seem almost transparent, as if transmuted into thin plates of beaten gold, all the rest of the plant—the thousand plants between you and the sun—are deep-hued as the purpling fruit hid in the greenery.

Where the vine ripens, skies are warm and hearts are light. The Côte d'Or, its heights within sight of Mont Blanc, gets icy winds from the mountain in winter, but the summer makes up for everything. No wonder that a certain nonchalance, even mental laziness, is imputed to the Burgundian character. Nowhere in the world is there more jollity and open-heartedness; yet as the famous wine of Bourgogne is none the less rich and mellow on account of its sparkle, so the character of the people, with all its effervescing gaiety, lacks neither depth nor solidity.

Here from my notebooks is a picture of Dijon, from its suburban heights; the season, summer; time, early morning.

As yet day halted; pencilled in grey were the twin eminences over against its capital. Like yet different are those nodding hamlets: Fontaine, birthplace of St. Bernard; Talant, historic also, each

crowned by church, château, and clustering cottages; at their feet, the proud city of Charles the Bold, beyond, rising with gentle curve, the Golden Hills, vineyards famous throughout Christendom. In the luminous eastern belt Dijon wore almost an ethereal look, as if a brisk wind might disperse that picture in cloudland, slate-coloured silhouette against a gradually clearing sky. Lofty cathedral spire, slightly bent as if in perpetual adoration, as lofty Ducal Tower with its graceful balustrade, dome, cupola, and pinnacle, church and palace, gloomy donjon and city gates, showed above the cincture of ramparts, all faintly outlined on a neutral ground. Who that had never beheld a sunrising could divine the transformation at hand? Bright and beautiful became the panorama so lately outlined in silvery grey; the broad band of vineyard below was soon mantled with gold, warm amber light played upon the city walls, every cupola and spire glittered against the rosy sky.

Far away the proud eminence of Mont Afrique, outpost of the Golden Hills, had caught the glow, and, farther still, light vapoury clouds, rolling off one by one, showed those matchless vineyards, crowning pride of Burgundy, crowning joy of the world.

Not less radiant was the picture immediately under my eyes.

Those twin heights on the outskirts of the capital possessed artificial as well as natural likeness. Furthering the work of nature, architect and mason seemed to have kept up this similitude of set purpose. The churches crowning each hill were built

on the same plan, with spire surmounting square tower; above sloping green and rich foliage spread brown-roofed, white-walled hamlets. Just now, of emerald brilliance showed the vineyards below, of richest green the walnut and acacia groves, glistening white the little group of buildings on either summit, tiny acropolis of miniature kingdoms. The vastness and magnificence of the city beyond—its noble tower, the cathedral spire, just perceptibly curved as if in adoration, the exquisite little spire of S. Philibert, the massive towers of St. Jean and cupolas of St. Michael, but beautified these twin townlings by virtue of contrast. The pair seemed to stand back modestly, pages of honour in attendance upon sceptred monarch.

The "twisted tower" of St. Benigne mentioned by Ruskin was replaced by another a few years ago.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROUND ABOUT DIJON

In the inmost heart of a Burgundian valley, the Val Suzon, rises the Seine, and with a good pair of horses—better still, with relays—St. Seine-sur-l'Abbaye at the valley's close may be visited from Dijon in a day.

Here are records of more than one summer or autumn day spent with French friends amid these enchanting scenes.

The first stage of the way in hot weather is not encouraging, dull preface to bright pages! For upwards of an hour we follow a monotonous suburban road. By dusty fields, barracks, drying-grounds and market-gardens we almost on a sudden reach the head of a spreading valley; valley within valley better describe the shelving rocks, lawny terraces, and gold-green dingles unfolding to view gradually, all fresh, dewy and deserted, as if now for the first time intruded upon. The contrast was striking and unexpected. Now, instead of glistering white ways, parched fields, and formal alleys of plane-trees so white with dust, one might have thought a light powdering snow had fallen, our eyes rested on delicious coolness and greenery, and the ear was soothed with sounds of woodland

streams and babbling springs. Sweet and pastoral as was the landscape, it had yet elements of grandeur. Something of the ruggedness as well as the gracious smile of an Alpine scene was here. Far away, the rocky parapets shutting in the valley showed grandiose forms, woods of larch and pine lifted their arrowy crests against the sky, and many a mountain stream might be seen tumbling perpendicularly down shelving rock or green hillside. And nowhere in the world could knolls be found softer, turf more dazzlingly bright, rivulets more crystal clear, richer, more umbrageous shadow. Not a trace was now left of the flat, scorched, commonplace region just quitted. While just before it seemed as if the plain were interminable, so travellers might fancy now that the windings of the valley would never come to an end either. We might well wish it to wind on for ever, Nature here treating her worshippers as conjurors deal with rustics at a fair, every freshly displayed marvel surpassing the last. At each turn the valley grew fairer and fairer, and the world seemed remoter and more forgotten.

My first visit to the Val Suzon ended at the wayside restaurant, a picnic having been given by Dijonnais friends in my honour. Upon the second and equally distant occasion the drive was extended to St. Seine, where, with a friend, I breakfasted by invitation at the little Spa, perhaps no longer existing. Remote from the railway, offering no attractions in the shape of theatre, baccarat-table, or concert-room, this little Burgundian hydro had only attained local celebrity, whilst its natural charms are such as to appeal to the few rather

than the many. Hither in the long vacation came half-a-dozen families from the dusty capital in search of coolness and hay-scented air—a stray angler or two for the sake of the trout-fishing—an avowed gastronome, in order to taste the trout, and a few invalids for treatment. The enthusiastic founder of this establishment, Dr. Guettet, three-quarters of a century ago, purchased the beautiful abbatial grounds and built premises, firmly believing that in the future the little Spa would make not only his name but his fortune. Neither renown nor wealth came, but at the time of my visit the owner's faith remained steadfast as ever. He should wake up one morning and find himself the creator of a second Vichy in Bourgogne! Meantime faith, rigid economy during eight months of the year, and a scanty handful of clients from June to September, sufficed to keep things going. Yet another class of visitors must be named. Adjoining the establishment which, indeed, partly consisted of the ancient monastic buildings, stands one of the most beautiful abbey churches of France; in such close juxtaposition are the two, that at close of day a dreamer might fancy the olden time come back again, and the abbey flourishing as in the Middle Ages. Many an archæologist, and not unfrequently an artist, would come to study this exquisite fragment of Gothic architecture in its prime, for it can hardly be called more, time, decay and restoration having destroyed the rest. In the dusk of twilight, however, a delusion was possible. The grand outline of the ancient pile rises intact and majestic

against the pale heavens, no shreds and patches of clumsy restorers there harassed the eye as it lingered on the harmonious picture. A fairer it were hard to find; solid grey masonry subdued to the most delicate tints, buttress, arch and pinnacle taking hues hardly deeper than the clear, silvery sky. Here, as elsewhere in these regions, evenfall is often indescribably beautiful, every object remaining luminous and definite, yet without the luminosity and definiteness of day. The scene before us seemed cut out of mother-of-pearl.

Glowingly also could I describe many another haunt, equally sweet and equally hallowed by delightful memories—Bèze, with its ancient houses, Mont Afrique, whence on clear days we can discern Mont Blanc the château of Montculot, in which Lamartine penned his famous elegy, *Le Lac*. To give an idea of these would fill pages past counting. St. Jean de Losne—fully described by me elsewhere [1]—and Seurre, both on the Saône, should be visited as the traveller journeys to Besançon. To resuscitate a good Sternian word, zigzaggery is the proper watchword for travellers in France. On French soil we must diligently imitate our neighbours and turn askance from the clock.

The approach to Seurre, of noble memory, is very beautiful. Here are my impressions of an autumn visit.

In this favoured land harvests occur several times during the year, crop succeeding crop from May till October. Most beautiful is the aftermath of such a

[1] *East of Paris.*

season, especially by the river and at eventide. Serenely yet proudly, broad belt of blue parting two golden worlds, the Saône flows amid colza fields and meads, the vast level landscape and wide expanse of gently rippling water imparting a sense of inexpressible repose. No gradations of colour are here, no indistinct blendings of light and shadow; all is clear, defined, harmonious, azure heavens, intenser azure below, velvety green and gold around, the general brilliance subdued as evening wears on. Hardly a breath is stirring. Bright and lustrous as cornelian against the sky showed red and white beeves. As the sun sank behind a ridge of poplars, bars of solid gold seemed thrown across the lawny reaches of the river, whilst its crystal depths took a hue of mingled rose and amber.

Economic conditions transform the French landscape oft-times not for the better. With the golden colza crops, now superseded, the glory of Seurre has departed. Nevertheless, lovely views of the Saône meet us at every turn. At my hostess's house, the river flowed under our windows!

Auxonne, another little town of the Saône valley, is not striking as seen from the handsome bridge facing you as you quit the railway, yet the dark grey roofs clustered round the tall church spire, the girdle of walls, and double enceinte of ramparts tapestried with green, make up a pretty picture. Far away stretch the level lines of mead and colza fields, the river winding between its banks, full and blue in spring, oft-times in summer a mere thread of shallow water amid hot white sands. When navigation is

possible its quays present a busy scene; in autumn corn, fruit, and neatly-cut billets of wood being packed for Paris, the bargemen being picturesque athletes in their semi-seaman's dress.

Auxonne is now one vast camp, and as completely fortified as any town of the Middle Ages. It is protected by gates and a double enceinte, the ancient earthworks intervening bright with turf. Cannon are placed at frequent intervals, soldiers swarm everywhere, and enormous barracks dwarf the town into insignificance.

Fatalists might make much of the fact that Auxonne, a town defying every attack of the Prussians in 1870–71, should be associated with the youth of the first Napoleon. The victor of Jena and Auerstadt spent some years of his cadetship here. In the Saône he twice narrowly escaped drowning, and here too, as narrowly, so the story runs, marriage with a bourgeoise maiden called Manesca. Two ivory counters, bearing this romantic name in Napoleon's handwriting, enrich the little museum.

Appealing more strongly to the imagination is Jouffroy's fine statue of the modern Attila in the Place d'Armes. The figure is that of the young soldier of the Revolution, familiar to the Auxonnais in 1791. As yet obscure, perhaps as yet unconsciously ambitious, his face shows rather dreamy, pensive questioning than lust of power and glory. He seems to peer into the future, to ask of the Fates what they have in store for him, to strive to unriddle the mystery of the unknown. Cold, statuesque, beautiful, the features express deep pondering and

gloomy sadness. Doubtless by the Imperialists this statue was regarded as a palladium when the enemy thundered at the gates. Be this as it may, no Prussian entered Auxonne to gaze on the monument of her awful conscript!

## CHAPTER V

### BESANÇON AND ITS SCENERY

The hotels at Besançon had at one time the reputation of being the worst in all France, but kind friends in the city would not let me try them. I found myself, therefore, in the midst of all kinds of home comforts, domesticities, and distractions, with delightful cicerones in host and hostess, and charming little companions in their two children. This is the poetry of travel; to journey from one place to another, provided with introductory letters which open hearts and doors at every stage, and make each the inauguration of a new friendship. My exploration of the regions about to be described was a succession of picnics—host, hostess, their English guest, Swiss nurse-maid, and two little fair-haired boys, being cosily packed in an open carriage drawn by two sturdy horses; on the seat beside the driver, a huge basket, suggesting creature comforts, the neck of a wine bottle, and the spout of a tea-pot being conspicuous above the other contents. Thus I visited the beautiful valleys of the Doubs and of the Loue, the highlands of Franche-Comté, and the country round about Besançon. The weather—we were in the first days of September—was perfect. The children, aged respectively eighteen months

and three years and odd, proved the best little travellers in the world, always going to sleep when convenient to their elders, and at other times quietly enjoying the shifting landscape; in fact, there was nothing to mar our enjoyment of regions as romantic as any it has been my good fortune to enjoy. The sublime, the pastoral, mountain and valley, vast panoramas and sylvan nooks, all are here, and at the time I write of, for the most part untravelled.

Besançon—incidentally the birthplace of Victor Hugo—well merits the aureole.

To obtain an idea of its superb condition we must climb the height of *Notre Dame des Buis*, an hour's drive from the city. From a steep, sharp eminence covered by boxwood and crowned by a little chapel, is obtained an excellent view of the natural and artificial defences which render the Vesontio of Cæsar's commentaries as strong a strategical position as any in France.

But what would the Roman chronicler of the "Oppidum maximum Sequanorum" have said, could he have foreseen his citadel dwarfed into insignificance by Vauban's fortifications, and what would be Vauban's amazement could he behold the stupendous works of modern strategists?

Beyond these proudly-cresting heights, every peak bristling with its defiant fort, stretches a vast panorama; the mountain chains of the Jura and the Vosges, the snow-capped Alps, the plains of Burgundy, all these lie under our eye, clearly defined in the transparent atmosphere of this summer afternoon. The campanula white and blue, with

ARCIER, BESANÇON

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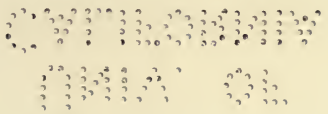

abundance of deep orange potentilla and rich carmine dianthus, were growing at our feet, with numerous other wild flowers. The pretty pink mallow, cultivated in gardens, grows everywhere. This is indeed a paradise for botanists, but their travels should be made earlier in the year. The excursions, walks and drives in the neighbourhood of Besançon are almost countless. The little valley of the World's End, *Le Bout du Monde*, must on no account be unvisited.

We follow the limpid waters of the winding Doubs; on one side hanging vineyards and orchards, on the other lines of poplars, above these dimpled green hills and craggy peaks are reflected in the still, transparent water. We reach the pretty village of Beurre after a succession of landscapes, *l'un plus joli que l'autre*, as our French neighbours say, and come suddenly upon a tiny valley shut in by lofty rocks, aptly called the World's End of these parts. Here the most adventuresome pedestrian must retrace his steps—no possibility of scaling these mountain-walls, from which a cascade falls so musically; no outlet from these impregnable ramparts into the pastoral country on the other side. We must go back by the way we have come, first having penetrated to the heart of the valley by a winding path, and watched the silvery waters tumble down from the grey rocks that seem to touch the blue sky overhead.

The great charm of these landscapes is the abundance of water to be found everywhere, and no less delightful is the sight of springs, fountains, and pumps in every village. Besançon is noted for its

handsome fountains, some of which are real works of art, but the tiniest hamlets in the neighbourhood, and, indeed, throughout the whole department of the Doubs, are as well supplied as the city itself. We know what an aristocratic luxury good water is in many an English village, and how too often the poor have no pure drinking water within reach at all; here they have close at hand enough and to spare of the purest and best, and not only their share of that, but of the good things of the earth as well, a bit of vegetable- and fruit-garden, a vineyard, and, generally speaking, a little house of their own. Here, as a rule, everybody possesses something, and the working watchmakers have, most of them, their suburban gardens, to which they resort on Sundays and holidays. Nothing can be more enticing than the cottages and villas nestled so cosily along the vine-clad hills that surround it on every side. The city is, above all, rich in public walks and promenades, one of these, the Promenade Chamart—a corruption of Champ de Mars—possessing some of the finest plane-trees in Europe—a gigantic bit of forest on the verge of this city—of wonderful beauty and stateliness. These veteran trees vary in height from thirty to thirty-five yards. The Promenade Micaud, so called after its originator, Mayor of Besançon in 1842, winds along the river-side, and affords lovely views at every turn. Then there are so-called "squares" in the heart of the town, where military bands play twice a week, and nursemaids and their charges spend the afternoons. Perhaps no city of its size in all France—Besançon numbers only sixty thousand inhabitants—is better

PROMENADE MICAUD

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off in this respect, whilst it is so enriched by vine-clad hills and mountains that the country peeps in everywhere.

Considered from all points of view it is a very attractive place to live in, and possesses all the resources of the capital on a small scale; an excellent theatre, free art schools, and an academy of arts, literary, scientific and artistic societies, museums, picture galleries, lastly, one of the finest public libraries in France. Archæological and historic monuments—here innumerable—I leave to the guide books.

One excursion must on no account be missed. The famous Osselle grottoes may be reached by railway. We preferred the landau, the lunch basket and the tea-pot, setting off early one morning in the highest spirits. Quitting this splendid environment of Besançon, we drove for three hours through the lovely valley of the Doubs, delighted at every bend of the road with some new feature in the landscape; then choosing a sheltered slope, unpacked our basket, lunched *al fresco*, with the merriest spirits, and the heartiest appetite. Never surely did the renowned Besançon *pâtés* taste better, never did the wine of its warm hill-sides prove of a pleasanter flavour! The children sported on the turf like little Loves, the air was sweet with the perfume of new-made hay, the birds sang overhead, and beyond our immediate pavilion of greenery, lay the curling blue river and green hills. Leaving the babies to sleep under the trees, and the horse to feed at a neighbouring mill—there was no wayside inn here, so we had to beg a little hay from the miller or a

farmer—we follow a little lad, provided with matches and candles, to the entrance of the famous grottoes. Outside, the sugar-loaf mill, so marvellously channelled and cased with stalactite formation, has nothing remarkable—it is a mere green height, and nothing more. Inside, however, as strange a spectacle meets the eye as it is possible to conceive. To see these caves in detail, you must spend an hour or two in the bowels of the earth, but we were contented with half that time, this underground promenade being a very chilly one. In some places we were ankle deep in water. Each provided with a candle, we now follow our youthful guide, who was accompanied by a dog, familiar as himself with the windings of these sombre subterranean palaces, for palaces they might be called. Here the stalactite roofs are lofty, there we have to bend our heads in order to pass from one vaulted chamber to another; now we have a superb column supporting an arch, now a pillar in course of formation, everywhere the strangest, most fantastic architecture, an architecture moreover that is the work of ages; one petrifying drop after another doing its apportioned work, column, arch, and roof being formed by a process so slow that the life-time of a human being hardly counts in the calculation. There is something sublime in the contemplation of this steady persistence of Nature, this undeviating march to a goal; and as we gaze upon the embryo stages of the petrifaction, stalagmite patiently lifting itself upward, stalactite as patiently bending down to the remote but inevitable union, we might almost fancy them sentient agents in the marvellous transforma-

tion. The stamens of a passion-flower do not more eagerly, as it seems, coil upwards to embrace the pistil; the beautiful flower of the *Vallisneria spiralis* does not more determinately seek its mate than these crystal pendants covet union with their fellows below. Such perpetual bridals are accomplished after countless cycles of time, whilst meantime, in the sun-lit world outside, the faces of whole continents are being changed, and entire civilizations are formed and overthrown!

The feeble light projected by our four candles in these gloomy yet majestic chambers was not so feeble as to obscure the names of hundreds of individuals scrawled here and there. Schopenhauer is at pains philosophically to explain the foolish propensity of travellers to perpetuate their names, or as it so seems to them. The Pyramids or Kentucky Caves do not impress their minds at all, but to see their own illustrious John Brown and Tom Smith cut upon them, does seem a very interesting and important fact!

The bones of the cave bear and other gigantic animals have been formed here; but the principal tenants of these antique vaults are now the bats, forming huge black clusters in the roof. There is something eerie in their cries, but they are more alarmed than alarming; the lights disturbing them not a little.

Pleasant after even this short adventure into the regions of the nether world, was the return to sunshine, green trees, the children, and the tea-pot! After calling it into requisition, we set off homewards, reaching Besançon just as the moon made

its appearance, a large silver disc above the purple hills.

In showery days, delightful hours may be spent in the Public Library, which is also a museum. Here are busts, portraits and relics of such noble Franc-Comtois as Cuvier, whose brain weighed more than that of any human being ever known; Victor Hugo, a name for all time; Fourier, who saw in the Phalanstery, or, Associated Home, a remedy for the crying social evils of the age, and who, in spite of many aberrations, is entitled to the gratitude of mankind for his efforts on behalf of education, and the elevation of the laborious classes; Proudhon, whose famous dictum, *La propriété c'est le vol*, has become the watchword of a certain school of Socialists; Charles Nodier, who, at the age of twenty-one, was the author of the first satire ever published against the first Napoleon, *La Napoléone*, which formulated the battle-cry of the Republican party; besides these, a noble roll-call of artists, authors, savants, soldiers, and men of science.

Noteworthy in this treasure-house of Franc-Comtois history is the fine marble statue of Jouffroy by Pradier. Jouffroy, of whom his native province may well be proud, disputes with Fulton the honour of first having applied steam to the purposes of navigation. His efforts, made on the river Doubs and the Saône in 1776 and 1783, failed for the want of means to carry out his ideas in full, but the Academy of Science acknowledged his claim to the discovery in 1840. The collection of works on art, architecture, and archæology bequeathed to the city by

Pierre Adnen Paris, architect and designer to Louis XVI, is a very rich one, and there is also a cabinet of medals numbering ten thousand pieces.

Besançon also boasts of several learned societies, the first of which, founded in the interests of scientific inquiry, dates from 1840. One of the most interesting features in the ancient city is its connection with Spain, and what has been termed the golden age of Franche-Comté under the Emperor Charles the Fifth. Franche-Comté formed a part of the dowry of Margaret, daughter of the Emperor Maximilian of Austria, and it was under her protectorate during her life-time and reverted to her nephew Charles the Fifth on his accession to the crowns of Spain, Austria, the Low Countries, and Burgundy. His minister, Perrenot de Granvelle, born at Ornans, infused new intellectual and artistic life into the place he ruled as a prince. His stately Italian palace, still one of the handsomest monuments of Besançon, was filled with pictures, statues, books, and precious manuscripts, and the stimulus thus given to literature and the fine arts was followed by a goodly array of artists, thinkers, and writers. The learned Gilbert Cousin, secretary of Erasmus, Prévost, pupil of Raffaelle, Goudinel of Besançon, the master of Palestrina, creator of popular music, the lettered family of Chifflet, and many others, shed lustre on this splendid period; while not only Besançon but Lons-le-Saunier, Arbois, and other small towns bear evidence of Spanish influence on architecture and the arts. In the most out-of-the-way places may be found *chefs-d'œuvre* dating from the protectorate of Margaret and the Emperor; such

treasure-trove makes travelling in Franche-Comté so fruitful to the art-lover in various fields.

A mediæval writer, François de Belleforest, thus describes Besançon :—

" Si par l'antiquité, continuée en grandeur, la bénédiction de Dieu se cognoit en une lieu, il n'y a ville ni cité en toutes les Gaules qui ayt plus grande occasion de remarquer la faveur de Dieu, en soy que la cité dont nous avions prise le discours. Car, en premier lieu, elle est assise en aussi bonne et riche assiette que ville du monde ; estant entourée de riches costeaux et vignobles, et de belles et hautes fôrets, ayant la rivière du Doux qui passe par le millieu, et enclost pour le plupart d'icelle, estant bien, d'ailleurs fort bien approvisionée.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE VALLEY OF THE LOUE

Let the traveller now follow me to Ornans, Courbet's birth- and favourite abiding-place, and the lovely Valley of the Loue. This is the excursion *par excellence* from Besançon, and may be made in two ways, either on foot, occupying three or four days, decidedly the most advantageous for those who can do it, or by carriage in a single day, starting very early in the morning, and telegraphing for relays at Ornans the previous afternoon. This is how we managed it, starting at five, and reaching home soon after eight at night. The children accompanied us, and I must say, better fellow-travellers I never had than these mites of eighteen months and three and a half years. When tired of looking at the cows, oxen, goats, horses, poultry we passed on the road, they would amuse themselves for an hour by quietly munching a roll, and, when that occupation at last came to an end, they would go to sleep, waking up just as happy as before.

Ornans is not only extremely picturesque in itself, but interesting as the birth- and favourite abiding-place of the famous painter Courbet; it is also a starting-place for the Valley of the Loue, and the source of this beautiful little river, the last only to

be seen in fine, dry weather, on account of the steepness and slipperiness of the road. The climate of Franche-Comté is unfortunately very much like our own, being excessively changeable, rainy, blowy, sunny, all in a breath. To-day's unclouded sunshine is no guarantee of fine weather to-morrow, and although, as a rule, September is the finest month of the year here, it was very variable during my stay, with alternations of rain and chilliness. Fine days had to be waited for and seized upon with avidity, whilst the temperature is liable to great and sudden variations.

We reach Ornans after a drive of three hours, amid hills luxuriantly draped with vines and craggy peaks clothed with verdure, here and there wide stretches of velvety pasture with cattle feeding, and haymakers turning over the autumn hay. Everywhere we find these at work, and picturesque figures they are.

Ornans is lovely, and no wonder that Courbet was fond of it. Nestled in a deep valley of green rocks and vineyards, and built on the banks of the transparent Loue, its quaint spire rising from the midst, the place commends itself alike to artist, naturalist, and angler. The old-world houses reflected in the river are marvellously paintable, and the scene, as we saw it after a heavy rain, glowed in the brightest and warmest light.

Courbet's house is situated by the roadside, on the outskirts of the town, fronting the river and the bright green terraced hills above. It is a low, one-storied house, embosomed in greenery, very rural, pretty, and artistic. In the dining-room we were

shown a small statue of the painter by his own hand, giving one rather the idea of a country squire or sporting farmer than a great artist, and his house—which is not shown to strangers—is full of interesting reminiscences of its owner. In the kitchen is a splendid Renaissance chimney-piece of sculptured marble. This treasure Courbet found in some old château near, and, artist-like, transferred it to his cottage before he helped to overthrow the Vendôme Column, and thus forfeited the good feeling of his fellow-townsmen. After that unfortunate affair, an exquisite statue, with which he had decorated the public fountain, was thrown down, at clerical instigation. Morteau, to be described further on, being more enlightened, rescued the dishonoured statue, and it now adorns the public fountain of that village. It is, indeed, impossible to give any idea of the vindictive spirit with which Courbet was treated by his native village, and it must have galled him deeply. We were allowed to wander at will over the house and straggling gardens, having friends in the present occupants, but at the time it belonged to the Courbet family, and was not otherwise to be seen.

All this while I was listening, with no little edification, to the remarks of our young driver, who took the keenest interest in Courbet and art generally. He told me, as an instance of the strong feeling existing against Courbet after the events of the Commune, that, upon one occasion when the painter had been drinking a toast with a friend in a café, he had no sooner quitted the place than a young officer sprang up and dashed the polluted glass to the

ground, shattering it into a dozen pieces. "No one shall henceforth drink out of a glass used by that man," he said, and doubtless he was only echoing the popular sentiment.

Ornans is the birthplace of the princely Perronet de Granvelle, father of the Cardinal whose portrait by Titian adorns the picture gallery of Besançon, and whose munificent patronage of arts and letters turned that city into a little Florence during the Spanish *régime*. In the church is seen the plain red marble sarcophagus of his parents, also a carved reading desk and several pictures presented to the church by his son, the Cardinal. There is a curious old Spanish house in the town, relic of the same epoch. Ornans is celebrated for its cherry orchards and fabrications of Kirsch, also for absinthe, and its wines. Everywhere you see cherry orchards and artificial terraces for the vines as on the Rhine, not a ledge of hill-side being wasted. Gruyère cheese, so called, is also made here, and there are besides several manufactures, nail-forges, wire-drawing mills, and tile-kilns. But none of these interfere with the pastoralness of the scenery. Lovely walks and drives abound, and the magnificence of the forest trees has been made familiar to us by the landscapes of Courbet, whose name will ever be associated with the Valley of the Loue.

We were now on the high road from Ornans to Pontarlier, and were passing some of the wealthiest little communities in Franche-Comté, Montgesoye, Vuillafans, Lods, all most picturesque to behold, and important centres of industry. As we proceed further on the Mouthier road, the aspect changes,

and we find ourselves in the winding close-shut valley, a narrow turbulent little stream of deepest green tossing over its rocky bed amid hanging vineyards and lofty cliffs. Soon, however, the vine, oak, beech, and ash tree disappear, and we have instead sombre pine and fir only.

Mouthier is perched on a hill-side amid grandiose mountains, and is hardly less picturesque than Ornans, though not nearly so enticing. In fact we found it dingy when visited in detail, though charming viewed from the high road above. Here we sat down to an excellent dinner at one end of the *salle-à-manger;* at the other being a long table where a number of peasant farmers, carters, and graziers—it was market day—were faring equally well: our driver was amongst them, and all were as quiet and well-behaved as possible. The charges were very low, the food good, the wine sour as vinegar, and the people obliging in the extreme.

After having halted to look at the beautiful old wood-carvings in the church, we continued our way, climbing the mountain road towards Pontarlier; hardly knowing which to admire most, the deep-lying valley at our feet, through which the little imprisoned river curls with a noise as of thunder, making miniature cascades at every step, or the limestone rocks of majestic shape towering above on the other side. One of these, the so-called *Roche de Hautepierre*, is double the height of the Great Pyramid; the road all the time zigzagging wonderfully around the mountain sides—a stupendous piece of engineering which cost the originator his life. Soon after passing the tunnel cut in the

rock, we saw an inscription telling how this engineer, while engaged in taking his measurements, lost his footing and was precipitated into the awful ravine below. The road itself was opened in 1845, and is mainly due to the public spirit of the inhabitants of Ornans.

Franche-Comté is rich in mountain roads, and none are more wonderful than this. As we crawl at a snail's pace between rocks and ravine, silvery grey masses towering against the glowing purple sky, deepest green fastnesses below that make us giddy to behold, all is still but for the sea-like roar of the little river as it pours down impetuously from its mountain home. The heavy rain of the night before unfortunately prevented us from reaching the source, a delightful excursion in tolerably dry weather, but impracticable after a rainfall. Between Mouthier and the source of the Loue is a bit of wild romantic scenery known as the *Combes de Nouaille*, home of the Franc-Comtois elf, or fairy, called *la Vouivre*. *Combe* means a straight, narrow valley lying between two mountains, and Charles Nodier remarks: "is very French, and perfectly intelligible in any part of the country, but has been omitted in the Dictionary of the Academy, because there is no *combe* at the Tuileries, the Champs Elysées or the Luxembourg!" These close winding valleys form one of the most characteristic and picturesque features of Franc-Comtois scenery. Leaving the more adventuresome part of this journey therefore to travellers luckier in respect of weather than ourselves, we turned our horses' heads towards Ornans, where we rested, a second

time, for coffee and a little chat with friends. As we set out for Besançon, a splendid glow of sunset lit up Courbet's home, clothing in richest gold the hills and hanging woods he portrayed with so much vigour and poetic feeling. The glories of the sinking sun lingered long, and, when the last crimson ray faded, a full pearly moon rose in the clear heavens, lighting us on our way.

A few days after this delightful excursion, I left Besançon amid the heartiest leave-takings, and the last recollection I brought away from the venerable town is of two little fair-haired boys, whose faces were lifted to mine for a farewell kiss in the railway station.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HIGHLANDS OF THE DOUBS

The picturesque and most historic little Protestant town of Montbéliard, reached in two hours from Besançon, and in which I once spent many pleasant days with French friends, need not detain the traveller. But here, willy nilly, he must halt in order to visit the magnificent scenery of the Doubs.

The railway through this romantic region had not been constructed at the time of my own trip, made by carriage, myself having for companion the widow of a French officer. The only fault of the lady was that she never could be brought to grumble. Unpunctuality, dirt, noise, discomfort left her absolutely unmoved. The pleasure of travel atoned for all shortcomings.

Our little calèche and horse left much to desire, but the good qualities of our driver made up for everything. He was a fine old man, with a face worthy of a Roman Emperor, and, having driven all over the country for thirty years, knew it well, and found friends everywhere. Although wearing a blue cotton blouse, he was in the best sense of the word a gentleman, but we were somewhat astonished to find him seated opposite to us at our first *table d'hôte* breakfast. We soon saw that he well deserved the respect shown him; quiet, polite, dig-

nified, he was the last person in the world to abuse his privileges, never dreaming of familiarity. The extreme politeness shown towards the working classes here by all in a superior social station doubtless accounts for the good manners we find among them. My fellow-traveller never dreamed of accosting our good Eugène without the preliminary Monsieur, and did not feel herself at all aggrieved at having him for her *vis-à-vis* at meals. Eugène, like the greater number of his fellow-countrymen, is proud and economical, and, in order not to become dependent upon his children or charity in his old age, had already with his savings bought a house and garden.

Soon after quitting Montbéliard we began to ascend, and for the rest of the day were gradually exchanging the region of corn-fields and vineyards for that of the pine. From Montbéliard to St. Hippolyte is a superb drive of about five hours, amid wild gorges, grandiose rocks that have taken every imaginable form—rampart, citadel, fortress, tower, all trellised and tasselled with the brightest green; and narrow mountains, valleys—delicious little emerald oases shut in by towering heights on every side. The mingled wildness and beauty of the scenery reached their culminating point at St. Hippolyte, a pretty little town with picturesque church, superbly situated at the foot of three mountain gorges and the confluence of the Doubs with the Dessoubre, the latter river turning off in the direction of Fuans. Here we halt for breakfast, and in two hours' time are again ascending, looking down from a tremendous height at the town, incom-

parably situated in the very heart of these solitary passes and ravines. Our road is a wonderful bit of achievement, curling as it does around what below appear unapproachable precipices. This famous road was constructed with many others in Louis Philippe's time, and must have done great things for the progress of the country. Excepting an isolated little château here and there, and an occasional diligence and band of cantonniers, all is solitary, and the solitariness and grandeur increase as we leave the region of rocks and ravines to enter the pine forests—still getting higher and higher. From St. Hippolyte to our next halting-place, Maîche, the road only quits one pine-wood to enter another, our way now being perfectly solitary, no herdsman's hut in sight, no sound of bird or animal, nothing to break the silence. Some of these trees are of enormous height—their sombre foliage at this season of the year being relieved by an abundance of light brown cones, so many gigantic Christmas trees hung with golden gifts. Glorious as is the scenery we had lately passed, hoary rocks clothed with richest green, verdant slopes, valleys, and mountain sides all glowing in the sunshine—the majestic gloom and isolation of these fastnesses appeal more to the imagination. Next to the sea, the pine-forest, to my thinking, is the sublimest of nature's handiworks. Nothing can lessen, nothing can enlarge such grandeur as we have here. Sea and pine-forest are the same, alike in thunder-cloud or under a serene sky—summer and winter, lightning and rain—we can hardly add by a hairbreadth to the impression they produce.

Maîche might conveniently be made a summer resort, and I can fancy nothing healthier and pleasanter than such a sojourn around these fragrant pines. The hotel, too, pleased us greatly, and the landlady, like most of the people we have to do with in these parts, was all kindness, obligingness, and good-nature. In large cities and cosmopolitan hotels, a traveller is Number one, two, or three, as the case may be, and nothing more. Here, host and hostess interest themselves in all their visitors, and regard them as human beings. The charges moreover were so trifling that, in undertaking a journey of this kind, hotel expenses need hardly count at all —the real cost was the carriage.

From Maîche to Le Russey, our halting-place for the night, is a distance of three hours only, during which we are still surrounded by pines. Le Russey possesses no attractions, except a quaint and highly artistic monument to the memory of one of her children, a certain Jesuit missionary, whose imposing statue, cross in hand, is conspicuously placed above the public fountain. Such monuments lend character to provincial towns, and keep up a spirit of patriotism and emulation among the people.

Next morning we were off at eight o'clock; our road, now level for the most part, leading us through very different scenery from that of the day before, monotonous open country, mostly pasturage, with lines of pine and fir against the horizon, in many places rocky wastes hardly affording scant herbage for the cattle. Much of this scenery reminded me of the Fell district or North Wales, but by degrees we entered upon a far more interesting

region. We were now close to Switzerland, and the landscape already wore a Swiss look. There is nothing premier in a quiet way than this borderland, reached after a long stretch of dreary plain; here we have grace without severity, beauty without gloom, pastoral hills and dales alive with the tinkling of cattle-bells, and pleasingly diversified with villages scattered here and there; a church spire rising above the broad-roofed, white-washed châlets on every side, undulating green pastures, in some places shut in by pine-clad ridges, in others by smiling green hills. We see patches of corn still too green to cut, also of beet-root, maize, hemp, and potatoes; the chief produce of these parts is of course that of the dairy, the "mountain butter" being famous in these parts. Throughout our journey we had never lost sight of the service-berry trees; the road from Maîche to Morteau is indeed planted with them, and nothing can be handsomer than the clusters of bright red, coral-like, berries we have on every side. The hedges show also the crimson-tasselled fruit of the barberry, no less ornamental than the service-berry.

The greatest possible care is taken of these wayside plantations, the road destined to present the appearance of a boulevard. At La Chenalotte, a hamlet half-way between Le Russey and Morteau, enterprising pedestrians may alight and take a two hours' walk by a mountain path to the Falls of the Doubs; but as the roads were very heavy on account of the late rains, we preferred to drive on to the little hamlet of Les Pargots, beyond Morteau, and from thence reach the falls by means of a boat, traversing

the lake of Les Brenets and the basin of the Doubs. The little Swiss village of Les Brenets is coquettishly perched on a green hill commanding the lake, and we are now indeed on Swiss ground, being within a few miles only of Chaux de Fonds, and a short railway journey of Neufchatel and Pontarlier.

We trust ourselves to the care of an experienced boatwoman, and are soon in a fairy-like scene, a long sheet of limpid water surrounded by verdant ridges, amid which peep châlets here and there, and velvety pastures slope down to the water's edge; all is here tenderness, loveliness, and peace. As we glide from the lake to the basins, the scenery takes a severer character, and there is sublimity in these gigantic walls of rock rising sheer from the silvery lake like sheets of water, each successive one seeming to us more beautiful and romantic than the last. Perfect solitude reigns here, for so precipitous and steep are these fortress-like rocks that there is no coign of vantage, even for the mountain goat, not the tiniest path from summit to base, no single break in the shelving masses, some of which take the weirdest forms. Seen as we first saw them with a brilliant blue sky overhead, no shadow on the gold green verdure, these exquisite little lakes—twin pearls on a string—afford the daintiest, most delightful spectacle; but a leaden sky and a driving wind could turn this scene of enchantment into gloom and monotony, as we found on our way back.

The serene beauty of the lake, and the imposing aspect of the rock-shut basins give an ascending scale of beauty, and the climax is reached when, having glided in and out from first to last, we alight,

climb a mountain path, and behold far below at our feet, amid a deafening roar, the majestic Falls of the Doubs.

Such things are indescribable; but to come from the sublime to the ludicrous, I must mention the failing of our conductress. The good woman who acted as guide to the Falls could not hold her tongue for a single moment, and her loud inharmonious tittle-tattle put us in ill-humour for the rest of the day. When you make a long journey to see such a phenomenon as this, you should see it alone, or, at least, in perfect quiet. We had come opportunely for the Falls, however, the enormous quantity of rain fallen within the last few weeks having greatly augmented their volume. It was as if no river, but a sea were leaping from its prison, rejoiced to leave its rocky home and follow its own wild way. The profound impression created by such a scene as this, to my thinking, lies chiefly in the striking contrast we have here before us—a vast eddy of snow-white foam, the very symbol of impetuous movement, also of lightness, sparkling whiteness, with a background of pitchy black rock, still, immovable, changeless, as the heavens above.

As we stood thus peering down into the silvery whirlpool, and its sombre environment, we were bedewed with a light spray sent upward by the frothing waters. Our terrible female Charon gabbled on, and in order to be rid of her we descended. There is a restaurant on the French, also on the Swiss side of the basin we had just crossed, and we chose the latter, not with particular success. Very little we got either to eat or drink, and a very long

while we had to wait for it, but at last we had dined, and again embarked to cross the basin and lake. In the meantime the weather had entirely changed, and, instead of a glowing blue sky and bright sun, we had hovering clouds and high winds, making our boatwoman's task difficult in the extreme. However, she continued to clear one little promontory after another, and, when once out of the closely confined basins on to the more open lake, all was as easy as possible.

We found the Hôtel Gimbard at Morteau a vast improvement upon that of Le Russey, and woke up refreshed next morning after having well supped and well slept, to find, alas! thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain the order of the day. Our programme had been to turn off at Morteau in the direction of Fuans and the picturesque banks of the Dessoubre, reaching St. Hippolyte at night, but with great reluctance we were now obliged to give up this round. From Morteau to St. Hippolyte is a day's journey, only to be made by starting at eight in the morning, and there are not even decent wayside inns. So we patiently waited till the storm was over, and as by that time it was past mid-day, there was nothing to do but drive leisurely back to Maîche. More fortunate travellers than ourselves, in the matter of weather, however, are particularly recommended the other route. Maîche is a good specimen of the large, flourishing villages, or *bourgs*, found in these parts. All is life, bustle, and animation, and order and comparative cleanliness prevail. Some of the cottage gardens are quite charming, and handsome modern homes in large numbers

denote the existence of rich *bourgeois* families, as is also the case in the villages near Montbéliard. The commune of Maîche has large revenues, especially in forest lands, and we can thus account for the really magnificent *presbytère*, the residence of the curé, also the imposing Hôtel-de-Ville, and new costly decoration of the church. There is evidently money for everything, and the curé must be a happy person, contrasting his position favourably with that of his fellow-curés in the Protestant villages around Montbéliard. The down-hill drive from our airy eminence amid the pine-forests was even more striking than our ascent two days before; and we naturally got over the ground in less than half the time. The hotels here are adapted rather to the wants of the *commis-voyageur* than of the tourist. Yet there was a friendliness, a bonhomie, and disinterestedness about the hotel-keepers, which would soon disappear were Franche-Comté turned into a little Switzerland. At the table-d'hôte dinner, the master of the house always presides and looks after the guests; waiters there are none; sometimes the plates are changed by the landlady, who also superintends the kitchen, sometimes by the landlord, sometimes by a guest, and shortcomings are always made up for by general geniality. Everyone knows everyone, and the dinner is a meeting of old friends.

When we leave Pont de Roïde, we once more enter the region of Protestantism, every village possessing a Protestant as well as a Catholic Church. The drive to Blamont is charming—a bit of Devonshire, with green lanes, dells, and glades, curling streams and smooth pastures. Blamont itself is

romantically situated, crossing a verdant mountain side, its twin spires, Protestant and Catholic, rising conspicuously above the scattered villages; beyond these, the low mountain range of Blamont.

We have been all this time, be it remembered, geographically speaking, in the Jura, though departmentally in the Doubs, the succession of rocks and mountains passed through forming part of the Jura range which vanishes in the green slopes of Blamont.

The next village, Glaye, is hardly less picturesque, and indeed all this neighbourhood would afford charming excursions for the pedestrian. The rest of our drive lay through an open, fairly-cultivated plain, with little manufacturing colonies thickly scattered among the rural population, in many cases tall black chimneys spoiling the pastoralness of the scene.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THROUGH THE JURA

The leisurely traveller will do well to retrace his steps from Montbéliard and zigzag to Lyons, by way of Lons-le-Saunier and the Jura. So far back as 1880 I wrote, "Travelling in the Jura will doubtless one day become the fashion," *i. e.* to English tourists. This forecast apparently has not been realized. Whilst every literary season brings its foison of works upon France, volume after volume, often beautifully illustrated, dealing with Brittany, Touraine, Provence and other much-betravelled regions, the Jura remains virginal, a veritable *terra incognita* to the Anglo-Saxon travelling world.

My own journeys hereabouts were not made tourist-wise and straight ahead; instead, the little trips were vacation sojourns paid to French friends. I will now record a few impressions gathered in opposite directions between Victor Hugo's sombre city and Lyons.

Salins must not be passed by. This little Spa, perhaps the most cosmopolitan and most progressive health resort of the Jura, is superbly situated—a veritable fairy princess guarded by monster dragons! Four tremendous mountain peaks protect it on every side, towering above the little town with

imposing aspect; and it is no less strongly defended by art, each of these mountain tops being crested with fortifications. Salins bears indeed a formidable front to the enemy, and no wonder the Prussians could not take it. Strategically, of course, its position is most important, as a glance at the map will show. It is in itself a wonderful place from its *assiette*, as the French say; and wherever you go you find wild natural beauty, while the brisk mountain air is delightful to breathe, and the transparent atmosphere lends an extra glow to every feature of the scene.

The Salins waters are said to be much more efficacious than those of Kreuznach, which they much resemble; and the nature of the soil is shown by its deep crimson hue. If the tonic qualities of these mountain springs are invaluable, it must be admitted that they are done ample justice to, for never surely were so many public fountains to be found in a town of the same size. A charming monograph might be devoted to the public fountains of Franche-Comté, and those of Salins are especially meritorious as works of art. How many there are, I cannot say, but at least half-a-dozen are interesting as monuments, notably the charming life-size bronze figure of a Vintager, by the gifted Salinois sculptor, Max Claudel, ornamenting one, the fine torso surmounting another, and of which the history is mysterious, the group of swans adorning a third, and so on; at every turn the stranger coming upon some street ornament of this kind, whilst the perpetual sound of running water is delightful to the ear. I shall never recall the Jura without this cool,

pleasant, dripping noise, as much a part of it as its brisk air and dazzling blue sky.

There is a good deal to see at Salins; the *salines*, or salt-works, the old church of St. Anatole with its humorous wood-carvings, the exquisite Bruges tapestries in the museum, the ancient gateways of the city, the quaint Renaissance statue of St. Maurice in the church of that name—wooden figure of a soldier-peasant on horseback—and lastly the forts and the superb panoramas to be obtained from them.

The most beautiful excursion perhaps is to the little town of Nans-sous-Ste.-Anne and the source of the River Lison, a two hours' drive amid scenery of alternating loveliness and grandeur—vines seen everywhere as we climb upwards, our road curling round the mountain sides, as a ribbon twisted round a sugar-loaf; having wound in and out jagged peaks covered with light foliage and abrupt slopes clad with vines, we come to the sombre pine, passing from one forest to another, the air blowing upon us with sudden keenness. No sooner do we emerge from these gloomy precincts than we reach the pretty little village of Nans, glowing in a warm sunlit valley, and most enticing to us after the sombreness and chilliness of the mountain tops.

Although anything but a *gourmand* myself, I will mention for the benefit of those who really care for good things, that we found a wonderful dinner awaiting us in the homely little auberge at which we alighted—hare, salmon, trout, prawns, and all kinds of local confectionery, were here supplied at the modest price of two francs and a half, the cook

of the establishment being the landlady herself, and the entire staff consisting of two old women. One of these was drafted off to guide me to the source, and off we set on our walk, at once leaving the warm open valley for gloomy fastnesses. On and on we went, the mountain closing upon us and shutting out more and more of the warm blue heavens, till we came to a stand. From these ramparts, here forbidding further progress, the River Lison has its source; above they show a silvery grey surface against the emerald of the valleys and the sapphire of the sky, but below, the huge clefts, from which we are soon to see the river issue forth exultingly, being black as night.

A few steps onward and we were in sight of the source, no words conveying its imposingness and sense of contrast—the pitchy, ebon cavern from which flashes the river of silvery whiteness, tumbling in a dozen cascades down glistening black rocks, across pebbly beds, and along gold-green pastures. We explored the recesses of this strange rock-bed; the little River Lison—springing from its dark, cavernous home, leaping forth with wild exultation into the light, pursuing its way under all kinds of difficulties, growing broader and broader as it goes, till a wide, sunlit river, it flows onward and onward, finally reaching the sea—reminded me, as I gazed, of a lovely thought emerging from the thinker's brain, which, after obstacles and hindrances innumerable, at last, refreshing all as it goes, reaches the open light of universal truth!

Behind the source, and ascended by a winding path cut in the rocks, is a lofty chasm, from the

summit of which another mountain stream falls with beautiful effect; and no less impressive and curious are the so-called *Grottes des Sarrazins*, a little further off, huge antres shutting in a little lake, and where the river rushes with a sound of thunder.

On the steep mountain path, leading to the chasm just mentioned, I found hellebore growing in abundance, also the winter-cherry, its vermilion-hued capsules glowing through the green. The brilliant red berry of the whitebeam-tree also lends colour to the wayside hedge, as well as the deep rose-coloured fruit of the barberry. Flowers also grow in abundance; and in the town their cultivation seems a passion. Some gardens contain sunflowers, or little else, others are full of zinnias, flowering mallow trees, and balsams. There is no gardening aimed at, in our sense of the word, but simply abundance of colour; the flowers are planted anyhow and grow anyhow, the result being ornamental in the extreme.

There is a pottery, or *faïencerie*, of two hundred years standing at Nans, and some of the wares are very pretty and artistic. The chief characteristics of the Nans ware, or *cailloutage*, is its creamy, highly-glazed surface, on which are painted, by hand, flowers, birds, and arabesques in brilliant colours, and in more or less elaborate styles. Attempts are also made to imitate the well-known Strasburg ware, of which great quantities are found in these parts, chiefly at sales in old houses. The Strasburg ware is known by its red flowers—chiefly roses and tulips—on a creamy ground, also elaborate arabesques in deep purple. If we take up a speci-

men, we find the ornamentation done at random, and, in fact, the artist was compelled to this method of working in order to conceal the imperfections of the porcelain. The Nans ware—very like the *faïencerie* of Salins—commends itself alike for form and design, and the working potters employed there will be found full of information, which they are very ready to impart.

It is impossible to exaggerate the beauty of Salins, and its stately environment of rock and vine-clad peak, especially seen on such a September day as I describe, when the sky is of warmest blue, and the air so transparent, fresh, and exhilarating that merely to breathe is a pleasure. Nor are the people less striking than their mountain home. Dark hair, rich complexions, regular features, an animated expression, are the portion of most, especially of the women, whilst all wear a look of cheerfulness and health. No rags, no poverty, no squalor; and the abundance of natural resources brings the good things of life within reach of all.

My next stage was Arbois, a little town travellers should see on account of its charming situation in the winding valley, or Cluse, of the Cuisance, where also I found good friends. Nothing can be prettier, or give a greater idea of prosperity, than these rich vineyards sloping on all sides, the grapes purpling in spite of much bad weather; orchards with their ripening fruit; fields of maize, the seed now bursting the pod, and of buckwheat now in full flower, the delicate pink and white blossom of which is so poetically called by Michelet "la neige d'été." No severity, no grandeur here, all is verdure, dimples,

smiles; abundance of rich foliage and pasture, abundance also of clear limpid water, taking every form, springs, cascades, rivulets; the little river Cuisance winding in and out amid vineyards and pastures over its rocky bed. You must follow this charming babbling river along the narrow valley to its twin sources in tangled glen and rock; the road winding between woods, vineyards, and fantastic crags. The narrow valley is paradisiacal, a bit of Eden made up of smooth pastures, rippling water, hanging woods, and golden glens, all on this bright afternoon sparkling amid dew and sunshine. At one of these river sources you see the tufa in course of formation in the river bed; in the other, the reverse process takes place, the tufa there being dissolved. Both sites are extremely lovely.

The half-Spanish little town of Lons-le-Saunier, fully described by me elsewhere, lies amid romantic scenery. Numerous walks and drives are to be made from what is now a Spa of local importance. Here I have more than once spent weeks with very dear friends.

But the principal excursion is that to the wonderful rock-shut valley and old Abbey of Baume, Baume-les-Messieurs, as it is called, to distinguish it from Baume-les-Dames, near Besançon. This is reached by a delightful drive of an hour and a half, or on foot by good pedestrians, and is on no account to be omitted. We, of course, take the former course, having two little fellow-travellers, aged respectively four and two-and-a-half years old, who, perched on our knees, are as much delighted as ourselves with the beauty of everything. We soon

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reach the top of the valley, a deep, narrow, rock-enclosed valley or gorge, and, leaving our carriage, prepare to descend on foot. At first sight, the path along the almost perpendicular side of these steep, lofty rocks appears perilous, not to say impracticable, but it is neither one nor the other. This mountain staircase, called the Echelles de Baume, may be descended in all security by sure-footed people not given to giddiness; our driver, leaving his quiet horse for a time, shoulders one child, my companion shoulders another, I followed with the basket, and in twenty minutes we were safely landed at the base of the cliffs we had just quitted, not yet quite knowing how we had got there! These rocky walls, shutting in the valley so closely that seldom any ray of sunshine can penetrate, are very lofty, and encircle it from end to end with majestic effect. It is, indeed, a winding islet of green, threaded by a silvery stream, and rendered impregnable by fortress-like rocks. We rest on the turf for a while, whilst the children munch their cakes, admiring the noise of the mill opposite to us, and the dazzling waters of the source, pouring little cascades from the dark mountain side into the valley. The grottoes and stalactite caverns are curious alike within and without, and in their inmost recesses is a small lake, the depth of which has never yet been sounded. Both lake and stalactite caves, however, can only be seen at certain seasons of the year, and then with difficulty.

The tiny river issuing from the cleft is called the Seille, and very lovely is the deep, narrow valley of emerald green through which it murmurs so music-

ally. By little and little the mountain gorge opens as we proceed, showing rich pastures where little herdsmen and herdswomen are keeping their cows; goats, black and white, browse on the steep rocks as securely as flies on a ceiling, and abundance of trees grow by the road-side. The valley winds for half-a-mile to the straggling village of Baume, and there the stupendous fortifications of cliff and rock come to an end. Nothing finer in the way of scenery is to be found throughout the Jura than this, and it is quite peculiar, being unlike any other mountain conformation I have ever seen, whilst the narrow winding valley of soft gold-green is in beautiful contrast with the rugged grandeur, not to say savageness, of its environment.

The buildings of this once important Abbey of Baume are now turned into a farmhouse, but enough remains to bespeak the former magnificence of the aristocratic monastery, to which none could be admitted without furnishing proof of pure degree of nobility on both the paternal and maternal sides. Adjoining the abbey is the church, which possesses at least one *chef-d'œuvre*.

This altar-piece in wood, belonging to the fifteenth century, is in the form of a triptych, the wings being enriched within and without by paintings in excellent preservation. The interior is divided into six compartments, in which are represented the various scenes of the life and passion of Christ. The various figures are finely sculptured, and covered with gold. Other paintings by the same artist decorate the walls of the church.

One tomb, that of an abbé of Baume, is very

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beautiful, being ornamented with seven small statuettes of weeping monks, who occupy little Gothic niches. The expression and attitude of these figures are touching in the extreme. All these monuments are highly interesting, and worthy of being studied in detail. The church is disfigured by not a few modern vulgarities.

Our way home lay through the picturesque valley of the Seille, and past many sites celebrated for their wines or antiquities. Vines, maize, buckwheat, potatoes, and hay covered the hill-side and the plain, whilst poplar- and fruit-trees gave abundant shadow. We pass Voiteur, with its ruins; Château Châlon, ancient Celtic *oppidum*, renowned for its wines, like Tokay, "véritable Madère sec Français, généreux," the Château du Pin, massive donjon perched on a hill, and still habitable, where Henry IV sojourned, and other picturesque and interesting sites, reaching home before dusk. In fine weather the inhabitants of Lons-le-Saunier frequently make picnic parties to Baume, breakfasting in the valley, but, alas! fine picnic weather is sometimes as rare in Franche-Comté as in England, and autumn always sets in early; by September, fires are grateful and warm clothes necessary.

## CHAPTER IX

### THROUGH THE JURA (*continued*)

GIVE me a diligence of the old-world style rather than the most perfect motor-car ever to be invented. It is owing to the diligence that I learned France by heart.

On quitting Lons-le-Saunier for Champagnole, our way led through rich tracts of vineyard; but no sooner were we fairly among the mountains than the vine disappeared altogether, and scant culture and pastures took its place. We soon perceive the peculiar characteristics of the Jura range, which so essentially distinguish it from the Alps. These mountains do not take abrupt shapes of cones and sugar-loaves, but stretch out in vast sweeps with broad summits and lateral ridges, features readily seized, and lending to the landscape its most salient characteristics. Not only are we entering the region of lofty mountains and deep valleys, but of numerous industrial centres, also the land of mediæval warfare and legend, whence arose the popular saying:

"Comtois, rends-toi,
Nenni, ma foi."

Our journey, of four hours, takes us through a succession of grandiose and charming prospects, and lonely little villages, at which we pick up

letters, and drop numbers of *Le Petit Journal*, probably all the literature they get. Gorge, crag, lake and ravine, valley, river, and cascade, pine forests crowning sombre ridges, broad hill-sides alive with the tinkling of cattle bells, pastoral scenes separating frowning peaks, all these we have to rejoice the eye, and much more. The beautiful Lake of Challin, we only see in the distance, though most enticingly inviting nearer inspection, and all this valley of the Ain might, indeed, detain the tourist several days. The river has its source near Champagnole, and flows through a broad, beautiful valley southward; maps avail little, the only way to understand local topography is to climb a height. At Champagnole, in the musical words of Ruskin, is heard "the first utterance of those mighty mountain symphonies soon to be heard more loudly lifted and wildly broken along the battlements of the Alps." Little is to be seen but saw-mills in the town itself, the click, click of these being heard at every turn. But a variety of delightful walks and drives are within reach.

I thought nothing could be more solemnly beautiful than my first walk on the road to Les Planches, black pines pricking against the purple heavens, golden warmth playing with ferns and tree-stems below, before us vistas of a deep gorge and violet mountain chain, on either side the solemn serried lines of the forest. The good pedestrian should follow this road to the village, as splendid a walk as any in the Jura. No less charming, though in a different way, is the winding walk by the river. The Ain here rushes past with a torrent

like thunder, and rolls and tosses over a stony bed, having on either side green slopes and shady ways. Those travellers, like myself, who are contented with a bit of modest mountaineering, will delight in the three hours' climb of Mount Rivol, a broad pyramidal mountain, over 2,000 feet above the town. A very beautiful walk is this for fairly good walkers, and though the sun is often intense, the air is sharp and penetrating. On our way, we found plenty of ripe mulberries with which to refresh ourselves, and abundance of the blue-fringed gentian and purple cyclamen to delight our eyes.

So steep are these mountain sides, that it is like scaling a wall, but after an hour and a half we were rewarded by finding ourselves on the top; a broad plateau covering many acres richly cultivated, with farm-buildings in the centre. Here is beheld one of those magnificent panoramas so plentiful in the Jura, and which must be seen to be realized. On one side we see the verdant valley of the Ain, the river flowing gently through green fields and softly dimpled hills; on another, Andelot with its bridge and the lofty rocks bristling round Salins; on the third, the road leading to Pontarlier amid pine forest and limestone crags; above this, a sight more majestic still, the vast parallel ranges of the Jura, of deepest purple, crested in the far-away distance by a silvery peak the name of which takes our very breath away. We are gazing on Mont Blanc! We would fain have lingered long before this glorious picture, but the air was too cold to admit of a halt after our walk in the blazing sun. The great drawback to travelling in the Jura, indeed, is this fickle-

ness of climate. As a rule, even early in the autumn, you are obliged to make several toilettes a day, putting on winter clothes when you get up, and towards mid-day exchanging them for the lightest summer attire till sunset, when again you need warm wraps. Winter sets in very early, and there is no spring, properly speaking; five months of fine warm weather have to be set against seven of frost and snow; yet in spite of the bitterness and long duration of these winters, little or no provision seems to be made against the cold. There are no carpets, curtains, and generally no fire-places in the bedrooms; all is cold and bare as in Egypt, and many are approached from without. The people must enjoy a wonderful vigour of health and robustness of constitution, or they could not endure such hardships. Snow often lies twelve feet on the roads, when journeys are sledged, as in Russia. During the terrible winter of 1870–71, famished wolves found their way to the very doors of the villages.

Alas! my second visit to Champagnole, after eight years' absence, was destined to be my last. Again and again the faithful friends of thirty years' standing press invitations upon me, and fain would I embrace the children of those who were children when I first visited these scenes. But travel in the Jura is for hardy pedestrians, at least for the middle-aged.

On the occasion of this first sojourn I took my favourite diligence to Morez, but the *coupé*, or open seat behind the driver, was over full, and the heat intense. It was harrowing to think that during those five hours we were amid most romantic

scenery, yet all we could do, by occasionally stretching out our necks, was to get a glance at the lovely lakes, pine-topped heights, deep gorges, gigantic cliffs towering to the sky, adorable little cascades springing from silvery mountain sides, gold-green table-lands lying between hoary peaks; everything delightful was there, could we but have seen. We had been climbing ever since we quitted Champagnole, and at one point marked by a stone, were 3,000 feet above the sea-level. The little villages perched on the mountain-tops that we passed, are all seats of industry; clock manufactories, *fromageries*, or cheese-farms on a large scale, and so on.

The population indeed depends, not upon agriculture, but upon industries for support, and many of the wares fabricated in these isolated Jura villages find their way all over the world. From St. Laurent, where we stopped to change horses, the traveller who is indifferent to cramps, bruises and contortions, may take the shorter and straighter road to St. Claude, following the more picturesque route by way of the wonderful little lake of Grandvaux, shut in by mountains, and peopled with fish of all kinds, water-hens, and other wild birds. We were now in the wildest and most grandiose region of the Jura, and whichever road we take is sure to lead through fine scenery. But much as I had heard of the savage beauty of Grandvaux, exchange of diligences and a longer route was not to be thought of, so I went straight on to Morez, after the tremendous ascent I have just described, our road curving quickly downwards, and coming all at

once on the long, straggling little town, framed in by lofty mountains on every side.

The position of Morez is heavenly beautiful, but the town itself hideous. Nature having put the finishing touch to her choice handiwork, man has come in to mar and spoil the whole. The mountains, clothed with brightest green, rise grandly towards the sky, but all along the narrow gorge of the Bienne, in which Morez lies, stand closely compacted masses of many-storeyed manufactories and congeries of dark, unattractive houses. There is hardly a garden, a châlet, or villa to redeem the prevailing, crushing ugliness; yet, for all that, if you can once get over the profound sadness induced by this strange contrast, nothing can be more delightful and exhilarating than the mountain environment of this little seat of industry. Morez, indeed, is a black diamond set in richest gold.

All day long the solemn silence of these mountains is broken by the noise of mill-wheels and rushing waters, and if it is the manufactories that feed the people, it is the rivers that feed the manufactories. The Jura, indeed, may be said to depend on its running streams and rivers for its wealth, each and all a Pactolus in its way, flowing over sands of gold. Nowhere has water power been turned to better account than at Morez, here turning a wheel, there flowing into the channels prepared for it, on every side dispensing riches and civilization.

Refreshing it is to get beyond reach of these never-resting mill-wheels, and follow mountain torrent and rushing stream to their home, where they

are at liberty and untamed. Innumerable delicious haunts are to be found in the neighbourhood of Morez, also splendid panoramas of the Jura and Switzerland from the mountain-tops. There is nothing to be called agriculture, for in our gradual ascent we left behind us vine, corn, maize, walnuts and other fruit-trees, reaching the zone of gentian, box-tree, larch, and pine. These apparently arid limestone slopes and summits have velvety patches here and there, and such scattered pastures are a source of almost incredible wealth. The famous Jura cheese, Gruyère so called, is made in the isolated châlets perched on the crest of a ravine or nestled in the heart of a valley, which for the seven winter months are abandoned, and throughout the other five swarm like bee-hives with industrious cheese-makers. As soon as the snow melts, the peasants return to the mountains, but in winter all is silent, solitary, and enveloped in an impenetrable veil of snow. The high roads are then imperceptible, and the village sacristan rings the church bells in order to guide the belated traveller to his home.

My friend here, the school-master's wife, found me agreeable travelling companions for the three hours' drive to St. Claude, which we made in a private carriage, in order the better to see the country. Very nice people they were, and much useful information they gave me about things and people in their native province. The weather was perfect, with a warm south wind, a bright blue sky, and feathery clouds subduing the dazzling heavens. We get a good notion of the Jura in its sterner and more arid aspect during this zigzag drive, first

mounting, then descending. Far away, the brown, bare mountain ridges rise against the clear heavens, whilst just below we see steep wooded crags dipping into a gorge where the little river Bienne curls on its impetuous way. There are no less than three parallel roads at different levels from Morez to St. Claude, and curious it was from our airy height —we had chosen the highest—to survey the others, the one cut along the mountain flank midway, the other winding deep down close to the river side. These splendid roads are kept in order by the Communes, which are often rich, in this Department, possessing large tracts of forest.

After climbing for an hour we suddenly begin to descend, our road sweeping round the mountain sides with tremendous curves for about two hours or more, when all on a sudden we seemed to swoop down upon St. Claude, the little bishopric in the heart of the mountains. The effect was magical. We appeared to have been plunged from the top of the world to the bottom! In fact, you go up and down such tremendous heights here that I should think it must be much like a journey by balloon or airship.

The bishopric in the mountains has been so glowingly described by different writers that no other town of the Jura is approached with equal expectation. Nor can any preconceived notion of St. Claude, however high, be disappointed if visited in fine weather. It is really a marvellous place, and takes the strangest hold on the imagination. The antique city, so superbly encased with lofty mountains, is as proud as it is singular, depending on its

own resources, and not wearing a smile to attract the stranger. Were a magician to sweep away these humming wheels, hammering mill-stones, gloomy warehouses, and put smiling pleasure-grounds and coquettish villas in their place, St. Claude might become as fashionable a resort as the most favourite Swiss or Italian haunt. But in its present condition it does not lay itself out to please, and the town is built in the only way building was possible, up and down, on the edge of the cliffs here, in the depths of a hollow there, zigzag, just anyhow. High mountains hem it round, and two rivers run in their deep beds alongside the irregular streets, a superb suspension bridge spanning the valley of the Tacon, a depth of fifty yards. Higher up, a handsome viaduct spans the valley of La Bienne, on either side of these two stretch clusters of houses, some sloping one way, some another, with picturesque effect. To find your bearings in these labyrinthine streets, alleys, and terraces is no easy matter, whilst at every turn you come upon the sound of wheels, betokening some manufactory of the well-known, widely imported St. Claude ware, consisting chiefly of turnery, carved and inlaid toys, and fancy articles in wood, bone, ivory, and stag's horn. Small hanging gardens are seen wherever a bit of soil is to be had, whilst the town also possesses a fine avenue of old trees turned into a public promenade. St. Claude is really wonderful, and the more you see of it the more you are fascinated. Though far from possessing the variety of artistic fountains of Salins, several here are very pretty and ornamental, notably one surrounded with the most captivating

little Loves in bronze, riding dolphins. The sight and sound of rippling water are delicious; rivers and fountains, fountains and rivers, everywhere; whilst the summer-like heat of mid-day makes both all the more refreshing. St. Claude has everything —the frowning mountain-crests of Salins, the pine-clad fastnesses of Champagnole, the romantic mountain walls of Morez; sublimity, grace, picturesqueness, grandeur, all are here, and all at this season of the year embellished by the crimson and amber tints of autumn.

What lovely things did I see during an hour and a half's walk with my new friends to the so-called Pont du Diable! Taking one winding mountain road of many, and following the clear, winding, deep green river, though high above it, we came to a scene as wild, beautiful, and solitary as the mind can picture; above bare grey cliffs, lower down, fairy-like little lawns of brightest green, deeper down still, the river making a dozen cascades over its stony bed, and round about the glorious autumn foliage, under a cloudless sky. All the way we had heard, mingled with the roar of the impetuous river, the sound of mill-wheels, and had passed I know not how many manufactories, most of which lie so deep down in the heart of the gorges that they do not spoil the scenery. The ugly blot is hidden, or at least inconspicuous. On our way home we had on one side a vast velvety slope, sweeping from mountain to river, terrace upon terrace of golden-green pasture, where a dozen little girls were keeping their kine; on the other, steep limestone precipices, all a tangle of brushwood, with only here and

there a bit of scant pasturage. The air was transparent and reviving, a south wind caressing us as we go, nothing could be more heavenly beautiful. The blue gentian grows everywhere, and, as I pursue my way, the peasant-folks I meet with pause to say good-day and stare. They evidently find in me an outlandish look, and are quite unaccustomed to the sight of strangers.

One lovely afternoon we set out for what turned out to be a four hours' walk but not a moment too long, seeing the splendour of weather and scenery, and the amiability of my companions. We took a road that led from the back of the cathedral by the valley of the Tacon, a little river that has its rise in the mountain near, and falls into the Flumen close by. It is necessary to visit the falls of the Flumen in order to realize the wonderful site of St. Claude, and the variety of the surrounding scenery. Every turn we take of the upward curling road gives us a new and more beautiful picture. The valley grows deeper and deeper, the mountains on either side higher and higher, little châlets peeping amid the grey and the green, here perched on an apparently unapproachable mountain-top, there in the inmost recess of some rocky dell. As we get near the falls, we are reaching one of the most romantic points of view in all the Jura, and one of the most striking, so imposingly do the mountains close around us as we enter the gorge, so lovely the scene shut in by the impenetrable natural wall; for within the framework of rock, peak, and precipice are little farms, gardens, and orchards —gems of dazzling green bathed in ripest sunshine,

pine-forests frowning close above these islets of luxuriance and cultivation, dells, glades, and open, lawny spaces between the ramparts of fantastically formed crags and solitary peaks, a scene recalling Kabylia, in the Atlas mountains, but unlike anything except itself. All was still, except for the roar of the tiny river and the occasional sound of timber sliding from some mountain slope into the valley below. The timber is thus transported in these parts, the woodman cutting the planks on some convenient ledge of rock, then letting it find its way to the bottom as best it can. The trunk-cutters are everywhere at work on their airy perches, now bright stairs of golden-green turf, soon to be enveloped in impenetrable masses of snow, and everywhere we hear the falling planks. As we climb, we are overtaken by two timber-carts, and the drivers, peasant-folks from the mountains, being old acquaintances of my companions, suggest that the ladies should mount. We gladly do so, to the great satisfaction of the peasants, who on no account would themselves add to their horses' burden. It would have been an affront to offer these good people anything in return for their kindness. They were delighted to chat behind with monsieur, whilst their horses, surefooted as mules, made their way alongside the winding precipice. The peasants had intelligent, good countenances, and were excellent types of the Jura mountaineer.

Having passed a tunnel cut through the rock, we soon reached the head of the valley, the end of the world, as it seems, so high, massive, and deep is the formidable mountain wall hemming it in, from

whose sides the little Tacon takes a tremendous leap into the green valley below; and not one leap, but a dozen, the several cascades uniting in a stream that meanders towards St. Claude. Before us, high above the falls, seeming to hang on a perpendicular chain of rocks, is a cluster of saw-mills. It is not more the variety of form here than that of tone and colour, rendering it so wonderful. Everywhere the eye rests on some different contour or combination. Into the history of this once abbatial little princedom I will not go. I hardly need recall the fact that its closing years are connected with one of the noblest pieces in all literature, Voltaire's plea for the abbey serfs.

By way—a most picturesque and delightful way, too—of La Cluse, Nantua, and Bourg (visiting the church of Brou, wrongly placed by Matthew Arnold in a valley), I reached Lyons, there exchanging my adored diligence for the Rhône.

# PART II

# DESCENTS OF THE RHÔNE AND THE TARN

## CHAPTER X

### FROM LYONS TO AVIGNON

FROM Lyons to Avignon by river is one of the finest sails in Europe, to my thinking the scenery surpassing that of the Danube or the Rhine. Picturesque and interesting as are the railway journeys by both right and left banks, the steamer offers a thousandfold of charm.

By half-past five o'clock on a brilliant August day, myself and friend were aboard the little *Gladiateur*, finding thereon a scene of indescribable liveliness and bustle. All kinds of merchandise were being stowed away—bedding, fruit, bicycles, bird-cages, passengers' luggage, cases, and packages of every imaginable description.

A stream of peasants poured in, bound for various stations on the way, all heavily laden, some accompanied by their pet dogs. First-class passengers were not numerous. We had an elderly bridegroom, who might have been a small innkeeper, with his youthful bride, evidently making a cheap wedding trip; a family party or two; an excitable man with a sick wife; a couple of pretty girls with two or three youths—brothers or cousins; a sprinkling of priests and nuns—that was all. The peasants with their baskets and bundles, at the other end of the vessel, made picturesque groups,

and the whole scene was as French as French could be.

I was just thinking how pleasant it was thus to escape the routine of travel, to find one's self in a purely foreign atmosphere, picking up by the way French habits and ways of thought, when one of the officials of the company bustled up to me.

"Pray pardon me, madame," he said, bringing out a note-book. "I see that you are English. Will you be so very kind as to give me the name and address of the great tourist agency in London? We are organizing an entirely new service between Lyons and Avignon; we are going to make our steamers attractive to tourists. You will oblige us extremely by giving a little information."

Crestfallen and with a sinking of the heart, I took his pencil—I could, of course, not do otherwise—and wrote in big letters:

MM. Thomas Cook et Cie,
Ludgate Hill,
Londres.

But those few words I had written sufficed to dispel the delightful vision of the moment before. Another year or two, then, and the Rhône will be handed over to Messrs. Cook, Gaze and Caygill—benefactors of their kind, no doubt, but ruthless destroyers of the romance of travel! Instead of French folk, with whom we can chat about their crops, rural affairs, and passing scenes, gaining all kinds of information, feeling that we are really in France, and forgetting for a while old associations, henceforth we shall find on board these steamers

our near neighbours, whom, no matter how much respected, we are glad to quit for a time. From end to end of the vesel we shall hear the voices of English and Transatlantic tourists, one and all most probably "disappointed in the Rhône;" but, indeed, for the river, we should as well be at home! However, I said, all this disenchantment happily belongs to the future; let us enjoy the present experience—one long bright summer day, so full of impressions as to seem many days rolled into one. Years have glided on, meantime the cycle and the motor, in a great measure, have replaced slower methods of locomotion, but such prognostics have not been fulfilled. The Rhône has escaped vogue.

The whistle sounds, punctually to the stroke of six; we are off.

It is a noble sight as we steam out of the quay de la Charité: the vast city rearing its stately front between green hills and meeting rivers; above, white châteaux and villas dotting the greenery—below, the quays, bordered with warehouses that might be palaces, so lofty and handsome are they, and avenues of plane-trees.

The day promises to be splendid, but mists as yet hang over the scene. Leaving behind us majestic city suburbs and the confluence of the Rhône and the Saône—one silvery sheet flowing into the other—we glide between low-lying banks bordered with poplars, and soon reach the little village of Irigny, its sheltering hills dotted with country houses. As we go swiftly on we realize the appropriateness of the epithet applied to the Rhône. Truly, in Michelet's phrase, "C'est un taureau furieux descendu

des Alpes, et qui court à la mer." If we are impatient to reach our destination in the heart of the Cévennes, the Rhône seems still more in haste to reach the sea. This extraordinarily swift current of the bright blue waters and the unspeakable freshness and purity of the air make our journey very exhilarating. Past Irigny we are so near the low, poplar-bordered shore to our left, that we could almost reach it with a pebble, whilst to the right lies Millery. From this point the river winds abruptly, and we see far-off heights and gentle declivities nearer shore, with vineyards planted on the slopes. The country on both sides is beautifully wooded, and very verdant.

The first halt is made at Givors, a little manufacturing town set round with vine-clad banks; here the little river Giers flows into the Rhône, one of the numerous tributaries gathered on the way. Just below the town is a graceful suspension bridge. But for the mists we should have a lovely view a little further on, where the hills run nearer together, the wooded escarpments running steep down to the water's edge. On both banks the scenery becomes charming. Close to our left hand rise banks fringed with silvery-green willows, and above a bold line of summits, part wood, part vineyards, with white houses peeping here and there; on our right, a little island-like group of poplars, the whole picture very sweet and pastoral.

As we near Vienne the aspect changes. There is an Italian look about the vines trellised on trees and festooned around the river-side châlets.

The approach to the ancient city itself is very

striking. A light suspension bridge spans the river banks just where Vienne faces the village of St. Colombe, ancient as itself. On the right we see the massive old tower built by Philippe de Valois; to the left, behind the houses crowded together pell-mell, rises the majestic pile of the cathedral. Here another tributary, the Gère, flows into the Rhône. Vienne was reputed a fosterer of poetry in classic times. At "beautiful Vienne," Martial boasted that his works were read with avidity. The scenery now shows more variety and picturesqueness. In one spot the river winds so abruptly that we seem all on a sudden to be landlocked, the hills almost meeting where the impetuous current has forced a way. The cleft hills as they slope down to the shore show deliciously fresh and verdurous dells and combes. Everywhere we see the vine, and with every bend we seem nearer the South. Between Vienne and Roussillon the aspect is no longer French, but Italian—the distant undulations being of dark purple, flecked with golden shadow, the nearer, terraced with the yellowing vine.

Our next halting-place is Condrien, on the right bank, celebrated for its white wines, a pretty little town, with vineyards and gardens close to the river side, the bright foliage of the acacia and vine contrasting with the soft ochres and greys of the building-stone. Above the straggling town on the sunny hill are deep-roofed châlets, and close to us—we could almost gather them—patches of glorious sunflowers in the river-side gardens. The mists had now cleared off, and we were promised a superb day.

The traveller's mind is all at once struck by the extreme solitude of this noble, vast-bosomed, swift-flowing river. We had been on the way for hours without seeing a steamer or vessel of any kind, our little craft having the wide water-way all to itself. Whilst the Saône is the most navigable river in the world, quite opposite is the character of its brother Rhône. Not inaptly has the one—all gentleness, yieldingness, and suavity—won a feminine, the other—all force, impetuosity and stern will—obtained for itself a masculine, appellative! And well has the Lyonnais sculptor given these characteristics in his charming statues adorning the Hôtel-de-Ville of his native city.

The Rhône has been called "un chemin qui marche trop vîte"; the rapidity of its currents and the difficulties of navigation up-stream are obstructions to traffic. But before the great line of railway was laid down between Paris and Marseilles, it was nevertheless very important. If we converse with French folk whose memory goes back to a past generation, we shall find that the journey south was invariably made this way. Formerly sixty-two steamers daily plied with passengers and goods between these riverside towns, now connected by railway. At the present time seven or eight suffice for the work.

This solitude adds to the majesty and impressiveness of the Rhône. Our little craft seems insignificant as a feather—a mere bird skimming the vast blue surface. After the clearing of the mists, we have a spell of unbroken blue sky and bright sunshine, followed by a deliciously cool, grey

English heaven, with sunny glimpses and varied cloudage.

Passing Serrières, with pastures and meadows close to the water's edge, and groups of cattle grazing under the trees, we reach Annonay, crested by a quaint ruin, the birthplace of the great balloonists, the brothers Montgolfier. The first balloon ascent was made from this little town in 1783. Boissy d'Anglas, the heroic president of the Assembly in its stormiest days, was also born here.

Next comes St. Vallier, an ancient little town close to the bank, with its castle of the beauty who never grew old, Diane de Poitiers—she whose mysterious cosmetic was a daily plunge in cold water; so say the initiated in historic secrets. Opposite to St. Vallier rises a chain of sunny, vine-covered hills, with sharp clefts showing deep shadow.

At Arras, on the right bank, is seen another picturesque ruin. No river in Europe boasts of more ruins than the Rhône. Then we reach the legendary rock called the Table du Roi. Just as Æneas and his companions made plates of their flat loaves, and so fulfilled the Sybil's prediction, St. Louis saw in this tabular block a dinner-table, providentially designed for the use of himself and his ministers. The great advantage of such a table lay in its immunity from listeners, thus the story runs. This *al fresco* banquet above the banks of the Rhône took place on the eve of the Seventh Crusade.

At this point the river is magnificent. Beyond the nearer hills rise the crumbling walls of a feudal stronghold, another ruin of imposing aspect. One

hoary tower only is seen, half hidden by the folds of a valley. On every slope the vines make golden patches, little terraces being planted close to the rocky summits. This persistence in a phylloxera-ravaged district is quite touching.

Passing Tournon and Tain, we soon come in sight of the famous little village of the Hermitage, a sun-burnt, granitic slope, its three hundred acres once being a mine of gold. Formerly a hectare of this precious vineyard was worth 30,000 francs. The phylloxera invaded it!

We now see in the far distance the blue range of the Dauphinnois Alps, and can it be—is yonder silvery glimmer on the farthest horizon the mighty Mont Blanc? Nothing can be lovelier than these wide mountain vistas, far above broad blue river, plain, and hill.

Passing the stately Gothic château of Château-bourg, where sojourned St. Louis, we get a glimpse of the sharply outlined limestone heights bordering on the vineyards of St. Péray, no less celebrated than those of the Hermitage. On the topmost crag stand out in bold relief the superb ruins of Crussol. At every turn we see walls of feudal strongholds frowning above the bright, broad river. By the time we reach Valence, soon after mid-day, we have only passed one barge.

Valence is beautifully situated. Facing the river and tawny, abrupt rocks, rises the splendid panorama of the French Alps. Here we leave more than half our passengers and merchandise. The cook, having now nothing to do, comes on deck to chat with a friendly traveller. I may as well mention that we

fared as well on this little steamer as at a second-class *table-d'hôte*. There was a small dining-room below, as well as a very fairly comfortable saloon. The attendants were exceedingly civil, and charges regulated by a tariff.

As an instance of the prevailing desire to please, I cite the following piece of amiability on the part of the *chef*. I had given tea and a tea-pot, with instructions, to the waiter. The *chef*, however, anxious that there should be no blunder, came up to me and begged for information at first hand.

"Pray excuse me," he said; "but I did not understand whether the milk and sugar were to form part of the decoction."

I gave him a little dissertation on tea-making, with the result that future travellers by the *Gladiateur* will obtain a fragrant cup admirably prepared. Even a French *chef* cannot be expected to know everything in the vast field of cookery.

Below Valence the scenery changes. The hills on either side of the river recede, and we look above low reaches and lines of poplar upon the far-off mountain range of Dauphiné and Savoy. Here and there are little farmsteads close to the shore, with stacks of wheat newly piled and cattle grazing —everywhere a look of homely plenty and repose. The river winds in perpetual curves, giving us new horizons at every turn.

Lavoulte, on the right bank, is a picturesque congeries of red-tiled houses massed round a square château. The town indeed looks a mere appendage of this château, so conspicuous is the ancient strong-

hold of the Vivarais. Livron, perched on a hill, looks very pretty. Soon we come to perhaps the grandest ruin cresting the bank of the Rhône, the donjon and château fort of Rochemaure, standing out formidably from the dark, jagged peaks, running sheer down to the river's edge.

After Le Teil is passed the clouds gradually clear. We have the deep warm blue of a southern sky and burning sunshine.

Viviers—former capital of the Vivarais, to which it gave the name—is most romantically placed on the side of a craggy hill, its ancient castle and old Romanesque cathedral conspicuous above the house-roofs. Just above the verdant river-bank run its mediæval ramparts tapestried with ivy, the yellowish stone almost the colour of the rocks.

The scenery here is wild and striking. Far away flashes the grand snow-tipped Mont Ventoux, limestone cliffs show dazzlingly white against the warm heavens, deep purple shadows resting on the vine-clad slopes, whilst close to the water's edge are stretches of velvety turf and little shady vales. At one point the opposite coasts are as unlike in aspect as summer and winter; the right bank all grace and fertility, the left all barrenness and desolation. And still we have the noble river to ourselves as it winds between rock and hill. Pont St. Esprit is another old-world town with a wonderful bridge, making a charming picture. It stands close to the water's edge, the houses grouped lovingly round its ancient church with tall spire. Here we do at last meet a steamer bound for Valence.

After leaving Pont St. Esprit the scenery grows

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less severe, till by degrees all sternness is banished, and we see only a gentle pastoral landscape on either side.

Bagnols, with its handsome old stone bridge, church with perforated tower, facing the river, makes a quaint and picturesque scene. This curious town, one of the most characteristic passed throughout the entire journey, lies so close to the water's edge that we could almost step from the steamer into its streets. Meantime, the long, bright afternoon, so rich in manifold impressions, draws on; cypresses and mulberry-trees announce the approach to Avignon. A golden softness in the evening sky, a heavy warmth and languor in the air, proclaim the South. Every inch of the way is varied and rememberable. Feudal walls still crest the distant heights, as we glide slowly between reedy banks and low sandy shores towards the papal city.

At last it comes in sight, rather more than twelve hours since quitting the quay of Lyons, and well rewarded were we for having preferred the slower water-way to the four hours' flight in the railway express.

The approach to Avignon by the Rhône may be set side by side in the traveller's mind with the first glimpse of Venice from the Adriatic, or of Athens from the Ægean.

The river, after winding amid cypress-groves, makes a sudden curve, and all of a sudden we see the grand old city, its watch-towers, palaces, and battlements pencilled in delicate grey against a warm amber sky, only the cypresses by the water's edge making dark points in the picture. Far away,

over against the city, towers the stately snow-crowned Mont Ventoux and the violet hills shutting in Petrarch's Vaucluse. How warm and southern —nay, Oriental—is the scene before us, although painted in delicatest pearly tints! It is difficult to believe that we are still in France; we seem suddenly to have waked up in Jerusalem!

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WITHDRAWN

## CHAPTER XI

### TO MENDE BY WAY OF LE VIGAN

On a former occasion I had set out for the Gorge of the Tarn from Le Puy, thence by train journeying to Langeac, from that little junction to another named Langogne, and from that point finishing the long day in the crazy old diligence plying between Langogne and Mende. An amazing six hours' drive it was, and well worth the fatigue, every bit of the way abounding in scenery, splendid or pastoral. France can hardly show fairer or more striking scenes than these highlands of the Lozère.

The first part of our way lay amid wild mountain passes, deep ravines, dusky with pine and fir, lofty granite peaks shining like blocks of diamond against an amethyst heaven. Alternating with such scenes of savage magnificence are idyllic pictures, verdant dells and glades, rivers bordered by alder-trees wending even course through emerald pastures, or making cascade after cascade over a rocky bed. On little lawny spaces about the sharp spurs of the Alps, we see cattle browsing, high above, as if in cloudland. Excepting an occasional cantonnier at work by the roadside, or a peasant woman minding her cows, the region is utterly

deserted. Tiny hamlets lay half hidden in the folds of the hills or skirting the edges of the lower mountain slopes; none border the way.

During the long winter these fine roads, winding between steep precipices and abrupt rocks, are abandoned on account of the snow. The diligence ceases to run, and letters and newspapers are distributed occasionally by experienced horsemen familiar with the country and able to trust to short cuts.

What the icy blasts of January are like on such stupendous heights we can well conceive. At one point of our journey we reach an altitude above the sea equal to that of the Puy de Dôme. This is the lofty plateau of granitic formation called Le Palais du Roi, a portion of the Margéride chain, and as an old writer says, "la partie la plus neigeuse de la route"—the snowiest bit of the road. On a superb September day, although winter, as I found, was at hand, the temperature was of an English July. As we travelled on, amid scenes of truly Alpine grandeur and loveliness, the thought arose to my mind, how little even the much-travelled English conceive the wealth of scenery in France! Our cumbersome old diligence carried only French passengers. Nowhere else in Europe does the English tourist still find himself more isolated from the commonplace of travel.

Many of the landscapes now passed recalled scenes in Algeria, especially as we get within sight of the purple, porphyritic chain of the Lozère. We gaze on undulations of delicate violet and grey, as in Kabylia, whilst deep down below lie oases of valley and pasture, the dazzling golden green con-

trasting with the aerial hues of distant mountain and cloud.

Nothing under heaven could be more beautiful than the shifting lights and shadows on the remoter hills, or the crimson and rosy flush of sunset on the nearer rocks; at our feet we see well-watered dales and luxuriant meadows, whilst on the higher ground, here as in the valley of the Allier, we have proofs of the astounding, the unimaginable patience and laboriousness of peasant owners.

In many places rings of land have been cleared round huge blocks of granite, the smaller stones, wrenched up, forming a fence or border, whilst between the immovable, columnar masses of rock, potatoes, rye, or other hardy crops, have been planted. Not an inch of available soil is wasted. These scenes of mingled sternness and grace are not marred by any eyesore: no hideous chimney of factory with its column of black smoke, as in the delicious valleys of the Jura; no roar of mill-wheel or of steam-engine breaks the silence of forest depths. The very genius of solitude, the very spirit of beauty, brood over the woods and mountains of the Lozère. The atmospheric effects are very varied and lovely, owing to the purity of the air. As evening approaches, the vast porphyry range before us is a cloud of purple and ruddy gold against the sky. And what a sky! That warm, ambered glow recalls Sorrento. By the time we wind down into the valley of the Lot, night has overtaken us. We dash into the little city too hungry and too tired, it must be confessed, to think of anything else but of beds and dinner; both of which, and of excel-

lent quality, awaited us at the old-fashioned Hôtel Chabert.

But we were already midway in September. Winter, we learned, was at hand, and truly enough, on the 19th of September it overtook us. Perforce we had to content ourselves with a glimpse of that wonderful table-land les Causses, truly called "The Roof of France," and forego the shooting of the rapids till another season.

By carriage—an expensive and tedious but gainful method of travel—we reached Rodez, spending the night at St. Chély d'Apcher.

At St. Amans, where we halted for breakfast, still the sun shone warm and bright, and the blue sky was of extraordinary depth and softness. I was reminded of Italy. As we sauntered about the long straggling village, a scene of indescribable contentment and repose met our eyes. We are in one of the poorest departments of France, but no signs of want or vagrancy are seen. The villagers, all neatly and suitably dressed, were getting in their hay or minding their flocks and herds, with that look of cheerful independence imparted by the responsibilities of property. Many greeted us in the friendliest manner, but as we could not understand their patois, a chat was impossible. They laughed, nodded, and passed on.

No sooner were we fairly on our way to St. Chély than the weather changed. The heavens clouded over, and the air blew keenly. We got out our wraps one by one, wanting more. If the scenery is less wildly beautiful here than between Mende and St. Amans, it is none the less charming, were

we only warm enough to enjoy it. The pastoralness of many a landscape is Alpine, with brilliant stretches of turf, scattered châlets, groups of hay-makers, herds and flocks browsing about the rocks. Enormous blocks of granite are seen everywhere superimposed after the manner of dolmens, and everywhere the peasant's spade and hoe are gradually redeeming the waste. It was nightfall when we reached St. Chély d'Apcher, reputed the coldest spot in France, and certainly well worthy of its reputation.

It stands on an elevation 3,000 feet above the sea-level. If the Lozère is aptly termed the Roof of France, then St. Chély may be regarded as its chimney top. Summer here lasts only two months. No wonder that the searching wind seemed as if it would blow not merely the clothes off our shoulders, but the flesh off our bones. Yet the people of the inn smiled and said:

"Wait here another month and you will find what *we* call cold!"

Doubtless to some travellers Siberian experiences on these plateaux would be more endurable than dog days in Provence. Warned by previous disappointment, next year I boldly confronted the latter drawback.

From Avignon by way of Nîmes, now twelve months later, with a friend I journeyed to Le Vigan, thus making a roundabout way to the Causses and the Tarn. Nîmes in August we found hot as Cairo in May, and thankful were we to exchange the torrid atmosphere and heavy, sulphurous heavens for the cool air and pastoral scenery of Le Vigan.

Past olive grounds and mulberry plantations,

ancient towns cresting the hill-tops, cheerful farmeries dotted here and there—such are the pictures descried from the railway. It was hard to pass Tarascon without a halt, but we were too anxious to shoot the rapids for lingerings. Ancient and curious little towns we got glimpses of on the way, all being stoically resisted.

I had heard nothing in favour of Le Vigan. The hotel was described to us as a fair auberge. The very place was marked down in my itinerary simply because it seemed impossible to reach the region we were bound for from any other starting-point. At least, the two other alternatives had drawbacks: we must either make a circuitous railway journey round to Mende, or a still longer détour by way of Millau.

Having therefore expected literally nothing either in the way of accommodation or surroundings, what was our satisfaction next day to wake up and find ourselves in quite delightful quarters, amid charming scenery! Our hotel, Des Voyageurs, is as unlike the luxurious barracks of Swiss resorts as can be. An ancient, picturesque, straggling house, brick-floored throughout, with spacious rooms, large alcoves, outer galleries and balconies facing the green hills, it is just the place to settle in for a summer holiday. On the low walls of the open corridor outside our rooms are pots of brilliant geraniums and roses; beyond the immediate premises of the hotel is a well-kept fruit and flower garden; everywhere we see bright blossoms and verdure, whilst the low spurs of the Cévennes, here soft green undulations, frame in the picture.

The weather was now that of an English summer, with alternating clouds, sunshine and fresh breezes. The inhabitants we found no less winning than their entourage; everywhere we were received as friends.

The Gard is foremost of all other departments in the matter of silkworm rearing, the Ardèche alone surpassing it in the number of silk-factories. In all the villages around Le Vigan are small silkworm farms, the peasants rearing them on their own account, and selling them to the manufacturers.

The workroom of a silk factory affords a curious spectacle.

At long, narrow tables, stretched from end to end of the workshop, sit rows of girls manipulating the cocoons in bowls of hot water—in Gibbon's phrase, "the golden tombs whence a worm emerges in the form of a butterfly"—carefully disengaging the almost imperceptible film of silk therein concealed, transferring it to the spinning-wheel, where it is spun into what looks like a thread of solid gold. Throughout the vast atelier hundreds of shuttles are swiftly plied, and on first entering the eye is dazzled with the brilliance of these broad bands of silk, bright, lustrous, metallic, as if of solid gold. This flash of gold is the only brightness in the place, otherwise dull and monotonous.

Gibbon gives a splendid page on the "education of silkworms," once considered as the labour of queens, and shows impatience with the learned Salmasius, who also wrote on the subject, because, unlike himself, he did not know everything. He tells us how two Persian monks, long resident in China, amid their pious occupations viewed with a

curious eye the manufacture of silk; how they made the long journey to Constantinople, imparting their knowledge of the silkworm and its strictly guarded culture to the great Justinian; finally, how a second time they entered China, "deceived a jealous people by concealing the eggs of the silkworm in a hollow cane, and returned in triumph with the spoils of the East." "I am not insensible of the benefits of an elegant luxury," adds the historian, "yet I reflect with some pain that if the importers of silk had introduced the art of printing, already practised by the Chinese, the comedies of Menander and the entire decade of Livy would have been perpetuated in the sixth century."

So charming proved Le Vigan that we lingered on; the pleasant little place and its people proved to us as Capua to Hannibal's soldiers, as Circe's cup to Odysseus.

We ought not to have stayed there an unnecessary hour. We should have continued our journey at once. On and on we lingered, nevertheless, and when at last we braced ourselves up for an effort, the terrible truth was broken to us. Instead of being nearer to the goal of our wishes, we had come out of the way, and were indeed getting farther and farther from that mysterious, so eagerly longed-for region, the terribly unattainable Causses. Our project at last began to wear the look of a nightmare, a harassing, feverish dream. We seemed to be fascinated hither and thither by an ignis fatuus, enticed into quagmires and quicksands by an altogether illusive, mocking, malicious will-o'-the-wisp.

True, a mere matter of eighty miles lay between

us and our destination, but surely the most impracticable eighty miles out of Arabia Petræa! We were bound for a certain little town called St. Enimie, but between us and St. Énimie stretched a barrier, apparently insurmountable as Dante's fog isolating Purgatory from Paradise, or as the black river separating Pluto's domain from the region of light. We seemed as far off the Causses as Christian from the heavenly Jerusalem when imprisoned in Castle Doubting, or as the Israelites from Canaan when in the wilderness of Zin.

To reach St. Énimie, then, meant two long days' drive, *i. e.* from six a.m. to perhaps eight p.m., in the lightest, which stands for the most uncomfortable, vehicle, across a country the greater part of which is as savage as Dartmoor. Our first halting-place would be Meyrueis, and between Le Vigan and Meyrueis, relays could be had, but at that point civilization ended. The second day's journey must lie through a treeless, waterless, uninhabited desert; in other words, as a glance at the map showed, we must traverse the Causse Méjean itself.

At this stage of affairs intervened the voiturier who had just proposed to drive us to the top of the Lozérien Helvellyn, provided we could sit on a knifeboard. He was one of the handsomest men we saw in these parts, which is saying a good deal. Tall, well made, dignified, with superb features and rich colouring, it seemed a thousand pities he should be only a carriage proprietor in this out-of-the-way spot.

"If these ladies," he said in country fashion, thus addressing ourselves, "will let me drive them to

Millau, they can have my most comfortable carriage, as the roads are excellent. They can sleep at a good auberge on the way. From Millau it is only five hours by railway to Mende, and from Mende only a four hours' drive to St. Énimie."

Having sent on our four big trunks by diligence to Millau, in perfect weather we set out for our first stage.

On the whole, the route now decided upon had much to recommend it, especially to travellers unfit for excessive fatigue. The drive from Le Vigan to Millau is thus divided into two easy stages, and the scenery for the greater part of the way is diversified and interesting.

Gradually winding upwards from the green hills surrounding our favourite little town, its bright river, the Arre, playing hide-and-seek as we go, we take a lonely road cut around barren, rocky slopes covered with stunted foliage, here and there tiny enclosures of corn crop or garden perched aloft.

The charm of this drive consists in the sharp contrasts presented at unexpected turns. Now we are in a sweet, sunbright, sheltered valley, where all is verdure and luxuriance. At every door are pink and white oleanders in full bloom, in every garden peach-trees showing their rich, ruby-coloured fruit, the handsome-leaved mulberry, the silvery olive, with lovely little chestnut woods on the heights around. Soon we seem in a wholly different latitude. The vegetation and aspect of the country are transformed. Instead of the vine, the peach, and the olive, we are in a region of scant fruitage, and only the hardiest crops, apple orchards being

sparsely mingled with fields of oats and rye. And yet again we seem to be traversing a Scotch or Yorkshire moor—so vast and lonely the heather-clad wastes, so grey and wild the heavens.

Every zone has its wild flowers. As we go on, our eyes rest upon white salvias, the pretty Deptford pink, wild lavender, several species of broom and ferns in abundance. The wild fig-tree grows here, and the huge boulders are tapestried with box and bilberry. One rare lovely flower I must especially mention—the exquisite, large-leaved blue flax (*Linum perenne*), that shone like a star amid the rest.

It is Sunday, and as we pass the village of Arre in its charming valley, we meet streams of country folks dressed in their best, enjoying a walk. No one was afield. Here, as in most other parts of rural France, Sunday is regarded strictly as a day of rest.

After a long climb upwards, our road cut through the rock being a grand piece of engineering, we come upon the works of a handsome railway viaduct now in construction. This line now connects Le Vigan with Millau and Albi, an immense boon to the inhabitants, one of the numerous iron roads laid by the Republic in what had hitherto been forgotten parts of France. Close to these works a magnificent cascade is seen, sheet of glistening white spray pouring down the dark, precipitous escarpment.

Hereabouts the barren, stony, wilderness-like country betokens the region of the Causses. We are all this time winding round the rampart-like walls of the great Causse de Larzac, which stretches from Le Vigan to Millau, rising to a height of 2,624

feet above the sea-level, and covering an area of nearly a hundred square miles. This region affords some interesting facts for evolutionists. The aridity, the absolutely waterless condition of the Larzac, has evolved a race of non-drinking animals. The sheep browsing on the fragrant herbs of these plateaux have altogether unlearned the habit of drinking, whilst the cows drink very little. The much-esteemed Roquefort cheese is made from ewes' milk, the non-drinking ewes of the Larzac. Is the peculiar flavour of the cheese due to the non-drinking habit?

The desert-like tracts below this "Table de pierre," as M. Réclus calls it, are alternated with very fairly cultivated farms. We see rye, oats, clover, and hay in abundance, with corn ready for garnering.

Passing St. Jean de Bruel, where all the inhabitants have turned out to attend a neighbour's funeral, we wind down amid chestnut woods and pastures into a lovely little valley, with the river Dourbie, bluest of the blue, gliding through the midst. Beyond stream and meadows rise hills crested with Scotch fir, their slopes luxuriant with buckwheat, maize, and other crops—here and there the rich brown loam already ploughed up for autumn sowing. Well-dressed people, well-kept roads, neat houses, suggested peace and frugal plenty.

What a contrast did the little village of Nant present to Le Vigan! It was like the apparition of an exquisitely-dressed, pretty girl, after that of a slatternly beauty. Nant, "proprette," airy, well cared for, wholesome; Le Vigan, dirty, draggle-

tailed, neglected, yet in itself possessed of quite as many natural attractions. We had been led to expect a mere country auberge, decent shelter, no more—perhaps even two-curtained, alcoved beds in a common sleeping-room! What was our astonishment to find quite ideal rustic accommodation—quarters, indeed, inviting on their own account a lengthy stay!

A winding stone staircase led from the street to the travellers' quarters. Kitchen, *salle-à-manger* and bedrooms were all spick and span, cool and quiet; our rooms newly furnished with beds as luxurious as those of the Grand Hotel in Paris. Marble-topped washstands and newly-tiled floors opened on to an outer corridor, the low walls of which were set with roses and geraniums as in Italy. Below was a poultry yard. No other noise could disturb us but the cackling of hens and the quacking of ducks. On the same floor was a dining-room and the kitchen, but so far removed from us that we were as private as in a suite of rooms at the celebrated Hôtel Bristol.

Nant is quite a delightful townling; we only wished we could have stayed there for weeks. It is a very ancient place, but so far modernized as to be clean and pleasant. The quaint, stone-covered arcades and bits of mediæval architecture invite the artist; none, however, come!

The sky-blue Dourbie runs amid green banks below the grey peak, rising sheer above the town; around the congeries of old-world houses are farms, gardens and meadows, little fields being at right angles with the streets. In the large, open market-

place, where fairs are held, just outside the town, we found a curious sight. The corn was gathered in, and hither all the farmers round about had brought their wheat to be threshed out by water-power.

It is a charming drive from Nant to Millau. Our road winds round the delicious little valley of the Dourbie, the river ever cerulean blue, bordered with hay-fields, in which lies the fragrant crop of autumn hay ready for carting. By the wayside are tall acacias, their green branches tasselled with dark purple pods, or apple-trees, the ripening fruit within reach of our hands. Little Italian-like towns, surrounded by ochre-coloured walls, are terraced here and there on the rich burnt-umber walls, the limestone ridges above and around taking the form of a long lone of rampart or lofty fortress, built and fashioned by human hands. In contrast to this savagery, we have ever and anon before our eyes the sweet little river, no sooner lost sight of amid willowy banks than found again.

The approach to Millau is very pretty. Almond and peach orchards, vineyards and gardens, form a bright suburban belt. Two rivers, the Tarn and the Dourbie, water its pleasant valley, whilst over the town tower lofty rocks in the form of an amphitheatre. Nant may be described as a little idyll. After it Millau comes disenchantingly by comparison.

Never was I in such a noisy, roystering, singing, lounging place. There was no special cause for hilarity; nothing was going on; the business of daily life seemed to be that of making a noise.

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MENDE

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In spite of its entourage, too, the town is not engaging. Its hot, ill-kept, malodorous streets do not call forth an exploring frame of mind. The public garden is, however, a delightful promenade, and the well-known photographer of these regions has his atelier in one of the most curious old houses to be seen anywhere.

Climbing a narrow, winding stone stair, we come upon an open court, with balconies running round each storey, carved stone pillars supporting these; oleanders and pomegranates in pots make the ledges bright, whilst above the gleaming white walls shines a sky of Oriental brilliance. The whole interior is animated. Here women sit at their glove-making, the principal industry of the place, children play, pet dogs and cats sun themselves; all is sunny, careless, southern life—a page out of *Graziella*.

We took train to Mende. It is one of those delightfully slow trains which enable you to see the scenery in detail, after the leisurely fashion of Arthur Young, trotting through France on his Suffolk mare.

Part of the way lies through a romantic bit of country: château-crowned hills follow each other in succession, every dark crag having its feudal shell, whilst patchwork crops cover the lower slopes.

Everywhere vineyards predominate, so persistent the faith of the French cultivator in the vine, so touching the efforts made to entice it to grow on French soil. Few and far between are little wall-encompassed villages perched on the hill-tops.

At Sévérac-le-Château romance culminates in the stern, yellowish-grey ruin cresting the green heights.

A most picturesque little place is this, seen from the railway. We now leave behind us cornlands and the vine, and reach the region of pine- and fir-woods.

On the railway embankment we see the yellow-horned poppy and the golden thistle growing in abundance; many another flower, too, as brilliant brightens the way—a large, handsome broom, several kinds of mullein, with fern and heather.

Bright and strongly contrasted are the hues of the landscape—purply-black the far-off mountains, emerald-green the fields of rye and clover at their feet. A large portion of the land hereabouts is mere wilderness; yet the indomitable peasant wrenches up the boulders, cleans the ground of stones, and inch by inch transforms the waste into productive soil. At every turn we are reminded of the dictum of "that wise and honest traveller," Arthur Young, "The magic of property turns sands to gold."

We are now in the region of the Causses; around us rise the spurs of Sauveterre and Sévérac. The scenery between Marvejols and Mende is grand; sombre, deep-green valleys, shut in by wide stretches of stupendous rocky wall, dark pine-woods, and brown wastes.

The evening closes in, and the rest is lost to us. As on my first visit to Mende, a year ago, I again lose the romantic approach to this wonderfully placed little city.

The Hôtel Manse, whither we now betake ourselves, is a great improvement on that of former acquaintance in matters of situation, sanitation, and

CAUSSE DE SÉVÉRAC

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comfort; the people are very civil and obliging in both.

And here we were not in the very heart of the stuffy, dirty, ill-kept town, but on the outskirts, overlooking suburban gardens and pleasant hills, with plenty of air to breathe.

## CHAPTER XII

### FROM MENDE TO ST. ÉNIMIE

So, just upon twelve months after my first attempt, I once more found myself climbing to the summit of the lofty plateau between Mende and St. Énimie.

It was a fortnight earlier in the year, and the weather was ideal; light clouds that had threatened rain cleared off, mild sunshine brightened the scene, and the air, although brisk and invigorating, was by no means cold. Still more enticing now looked the billowy swell of gold and purple mountains, and the dark cliffs frowning over green valleys. To-day, too, the exhilarating conviction of fulfilment was added to that of looking forward. A second time I had reached the threshold of the long dreamed of region of marvels, really to cross it and enter.

I was on my way to the Causses at last! More striking and beautiful than when first seen now seemed the upward drive from Mende, the beautiful grey cathedral, with its unequal spires—the one a lovely specimen of Gothic in its late efflorescence, the other wholly unbeautiful—cushioned against the soft green hills, the cheerful little town in its fertile surroundings, its wild, far-stretching waste and barren peak. More musical still sounded

in my ears the purling of the Lot, as unseen it ran between sunny pastures over its stony bed far below.

Little I thought, indeed, although of firm intention, when making the journey twelve months all but two weeks before, that on this 5th of September, I should be gazing on the same scene—a scene reminding me now, as then, of the vast reedy plateau gazed on at Saïda, dividing the Algerian traveller from the Sahara.

This time I did not stop to make tea gipsy-wise on the turf in front of the farmhouse; nor, to my disappointment, did the children run out to share the contents of my bonbon box. Not a soul was abroad; an eldritch solitude reigned everywhere.

The Causse of Sauveterre is not reached till we have left the farmhouse and ruined château far behind. From that point the roads diverge, and we see our own wind like a ribbon till lost to view in the grey, stony wilderness.

A considerable portion of the land hereabouts is cultivated. We see little patches of rye, oats, Indian corn, clover, potatoes, and here and there a peasant ploughing up the soil with oxen.

As we proceed, the enormous horizon ever widens; long shadows fleck the purply-brown and orange-coloured undulations; scattered sparsely are flocks of sheep, of a rich burnt-umber brown, but herbage is scant and little cattle can be nourished here. The swelling hills now show new and more grandiose outlines; at last we come in sight of the dark mass of the Causse de Sauveterre, and soon we enter upon the true Caussien landscape in all its weird and sombre grandeur. Just as when

fairly out on the open sea we realize to the full its beauty and sense of infinity, so it is here. The farther we go the wider, more bewilderingly vast becomes the horizon: wave upon wave, billow upon billow, now violet-hued, with a tinge of gold; now deep brown, partly veiled with green, or roseate with sunlit clouds—the grey monotony of stone and waste is thus varied by the way.

By the roadside slender trees of the hornbeam tribe are planted at intervals, and where these are wanting, tall flagstaffs take their place, to guide the wayfarer when six feet of snow cover the ground. Wild flowers in plenty brighten the edges of the road—stonecrops, cornflowers, purple lady's fingers, and many others; but wedged as we are in our not too comfortable calèche, to get out and pluck them is impossible.

The road from Mende to the summit of the plateau can only be described as a vertical ascent; before beginning to descend, we have a few kilomètres of level, that is all. As we approach the village of Sauveterre, we see one or two wild figures, shepherds, uncouth in appearance as Greek herdsmen, and poorly dressed, but robust-looking, well-made girls and women, short-skirted, bare-headed, footing it bravely under the hot sun.

Portions of the land on either side consist of waste, quite recently laid under cultivation; the huge blocks of stone had been wrenched up, heaven knows how, and conspicuously piled up in the midst of the newly created field—a veritable trophy! The rich red earth amply repays these Herculean labours. With regard to the tenure of land, I should sup-

pose the state of things here must be very much what it was in the age of primitive man. I fancy that any native of these parts, any true Caussenard, has only to clear a bit of waste and plant a crop to make it his own; a stranger would doubtless have his right to do so contested, or, maybe, some patriarchal system is still in force, and the village community is not yet extinct in France.

"Voilà la capitale de Sauveterre!" soon cries our driver, pointing to a cluster of bare brown, apparently windowless, houses, and a tiny church, all grouped picturesquely together.

A poor-looking place it was enough when we obtained a nearer view, reminding me of a Kabyle village more than anything else, not, however, brightened with olive or fig-tree! Nothing in the shape of a garden is to be seen, only dull walls of close-set dwellings, with narrow paths between. Windows, however, our driver assured us, were there; but the village is built with its back to the road.

The great privation of these poor people is that of a regular water-supply—one large, by no means pellucid pond, with cisterns, are all the sources they can rely upon from one end of the year to the other; not a fountain issues from the limestone for miles round, not a stream waters the entire Causse, a region extensive as Dartmoor or Salisbury Plain. When we consider that this plateau has a height above the sea-level equal to that of Skiddaw, we can easily imagine what the long eight months' winter here is like. For the greater part of the time the country is under several feet of snow, and

the Caussenard warms his poor tenement as best he can with peat.

It was curious to hear our conductor, himself evidently accustomed to a hard, laborious life, speak of the inhabitants of Sauveterre. He described their condition much as a well-to-do English artisan might speak of the half-starved foreign victims of the sweater—so wide is the gulf dividing the Caussenard from the French peasant proper.

"Just think of it," he said; "they don't even dress the rye for their bread, but eat it made of husks and all. Rye-bread, bacon, potatoes, that is their fare, and water: if it were only good water one would have nothing to say—bad water they drink. But they are contented, *pardie*."

"What do they do for a doctor?" I asked.

He made a curious grimace.

"They physic themselves till they are at the point of death, and then send for a doctor. But it is not often. They are healthy enough, *pardie!*"

With regard to the ministrations of religion, they are in the position of dalesfolk in some parts of Dauphiné. A curé from St. Énimie, he told us, performed mass once a fortnight in summer, and came over as occasion required for baptisms, marriages, and burials. In winter, alike ordinary mass and these celebrations were stopped by the snow. The services of the priest had then to be dispensed with for weeks, even months, at a time.

I next tried to gain some information as to schools, but here my informant was not very clear. Yes, he said, there was schooling in summer; whether lay or clerical, whether the children were

taught the Catechism in their mother-tongue—in other words, the patois of the Causse—or in French, I could not learn.

Do these wild-looking mountaineers exercise the electoral privilege? Do they go to the poll, and what are their political views? Are their sons drafted off, as the rest of French youth, into military service? Does a newspaper, even the ubiquitous *Petit Journal*, penetrate into these solitudes? It was difficult to get a satisfactory answer to all my questions, and quite useless to make a tour of inquiry in the village. One must speak the patois of the Caussenard to obtain his confidence, and though the population is inoffensive, even French tourists are advised on no account to adventure themselves in these parts without being accompanied by a native.

One thing is quite certain. The four thousand and odd wild, sheepskin-wearing inhabitants of the entire region of the Causses must ere long, may perhaps already, be nationalized—like the Breton and the Morvandial, undergoing a gradual and complete transformation. Travellers of another generation on this road will certainly not be stared at by the fierce-looking, picturesque figures we now pass in the precincts of Sauveterre. Brigands they might be, judging from their shaggy beards, unkempt locks, and Robinson Crusoe-like dress; also their fixed, almost dazed, look inspires anything but confidence. Still, we must remember that Sauveterre is in the Lozère, and that the Lozère occasionally enjoys the enviable pre-eminence of "white assizes"—a clean bill of moral health.

After quitting the village, which has a deserted look as of a plague-stricken place, the road descends. We now follow the rim of a far-stretching, tremendous ravine, its wooded sides running perpendicularly down. For miles we drive alongside this depth, the only protection being a stone wall not two feet high. The road, however, is excellent, our little horses steady and sure-footed, and our driver very careful. We are, indeed, too much interested in the scenery to heed the frightful precipices within a few inches of our carriage wheels. But the retrospection makes one giddy. The least accident or mishap, contingencies not dwelt upon whilst jogging on delightfully under a bright sky, might, or rather must, here end in a tragedy.

By and by, the prospect becomes inexpressibly grand, till the impression of magnificence culminates as our road begins literally to drop down upon St. Énimie, as yet invisible. Our journey must now be compared to the descent from cloudland in a balloon. Meantime, the stupendous panorama of dark, superbly outlined mountain-wall closes in. We seem to have reached the limit of the world. Before us—Titanic rampart—rises the grand Causse Méjean, now seen for the first time; around, fold upon fold, are the curved heights of Sauveterre, the nearer slopes bright green with sunny patches, the remoter purply black.

It is a wondrous spectacle—wall upon wall of lofty limestone, making what seems an impenetrable barrier, closing around us, threatening to shut out the very heavens; at our feet an ever-narrowing

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mountain pass or valley, the shelves of the rock running vertically down.

When at last from our dizzy height our driver bids us look down, we discern the grey roofs of St. Énimie wedged between the congregated escarpments far below, the little town lying immediately under our feet, as the streets around our St. Paul's when viewed from the dome. We say to ourselves we can never get there. The feat of descending those perpendicular cliffs seems impossible. It does not do to contemplate the road we have to take, winding like a ribbon round the upright shafts of the Causse. Follow it we must. We are high above the inhabited world, up in the clouds; there is nothing to do but descend as best we can; so we trust to our good driver and steady horses, obliged to follow the sharply winding road at walking pace. And bit by bit—how we don't know—the horizontal zigzag is accomplished. We are down at last!

How can I describe the unimaginable picturesqueness of this little town wedged in between the crowding hills, dropped like a pebble to the bottom of a mountain-girt gulf?

St. Énimie has grown terrace-wise, zigzagging the steep sides of the Causse, its quaint spire rising in the midst of rows of whitewashed houses, with steel-grey overhanging roofs, vine-trellised balconies, and little hanging gardens perched aloft. On all sides just outside the town are vineyards, now golden in hue, peach-trees and almond-groves, whilst above and far around the grey walls of the Causse shut out all but the meridian rays of the sun.

As I write this, at six o'clock in the evening, the

last crimson flush of the setting sun lingers on the sombre, grandiose Causse Méjean. All the rest of the scene, the lower ranges around, are in a cool grey shadow: silvery the spire and roofs just opposite my window, silvery the atmosphere of the entire picture. Nothing can be more poetic in colour, form, and combination.

Close under my room are vegetable gardens and orchards, whilst in harmony with the little town, and adding a still greater look of old-worldness, are the arched walls of the old fortress. As evening closes in, the fascination of the scene deepens; spire and roofs, shadowy hill and stern mountain fastness, are all outlined in pale, silvery tones against a pure pink and opaline sky, the greenery of near vine and peach-tree all standing out in bold relief, blotches of greenish gold upon a dark ground. I must describe our inn, the most rustic we had as yet met with, nevertheless to be warmly recommended on account of the integrity and bonhomie of the people.

Somewhat magniloquently called the Hôtel St. Jean, our hostelry is an auberge placing two tiny bedchambers and one large and presumably general sleeping-room at the disposal of visitors. We had, as usual, telegraphed for two of the best rooms to be had. So the two tiny chambers were reserved for us, the only approach to them being through the large room outside furnished with numerous beds. The tourist, therefore, has a choice of evils —a small inner room to himself, looking on to the town and gardens, or a bed in the large outer one beyond, the latter arrangement offering more liberty, freedom of ingress and egress, but less privacy.

However, the rooms did well enough. A decent bed, a table, a chair, quiet—what does the weary traveller want beside? Doubtless all is changed by this time.

Here, as at Le Vigan, we were received with a courteous friendliness that made up for all shortcomings. The master, a charming old man, a member of the town council, at once accompanied me to the post-office, where the young lady post-mistress produced letters and papers, probably the first English newspapers ever stamped with the mark of St. Énimie. The townsfolk stared at me in the twilight, but without offensive curiosity. I may here give a hint to future explorers of my own sex, that it is just as well to buy one's travelling-dress and head-gear in France. An outlandish appearance, sure to excite observation, is thus avoided. In the meantime the common inquiry was put to us, "What will you have for dinner?" It really seemed as if we only needed to ask for any imaginable dish to get it, so rich in resources was this little larder at the world's end. The exquisite trout of the Tarn, here called the Tar; game in abundance and of excellent quality; a variety of fruit and vegetables—such was the dainty fare displayed in the tiny back parlour leading out of the kitchen.

Since this romantic, adventuresome, and costly journey made twenty years ago, the gorge or cañon of the Tarn has became a favourite French excursion. Tourist tickets, including boats, hotels, and guides, are issued in Paris, and conducted parties now keep the place lively during the long vacation.

At the time of my visit, the leading men of the neighbouring villages had organized a tourist agency, mayors, town councillors and others forming a so-called "Batellerie de St. Jean," ensuring strangers a fixed tariff, good boats, above all experienced boatmen, for the somewhat hazardous expedition.

Had it been somewhat earlier in the year, we might perhaps have decided to make a little stay here. But in the height of summer the heat is torrid on the "Roof of France," in winter the cold is arctic, and there is no autumn in the accepted sense of the word; winter might be already at hand. We were advised by those in whose interest it was that we should remain, to lose no time and hurry on. Having bespoken the four relays of boatmen for next day, we betook ourselves to our little rooms, somewhat relieved by the fact that we were the only travellers, and that the large, general bedroom adjoining our own would be therefore untenanted. We had reckoned without our host, the comfortable beds therein being evidently occupied by various members of the family when the tourist season was slack. We were composing ourselves to sleep, each in our own chamber, when we heard the old master and mistress of the house, with two little grandchildren, steal up-stairs, and, quiet as mice, betake themselves to bed. Then all was hushed for the night.

Only one sound broke the stillness. Between one and two in the morning our driver descended from his attic. A quarter of an hour later there was a noise of wheels, pattering hoofs and harness

bells. He had started, as he told us was his intention, on his homeward journey, traversing the dark, solitary Causse alone, with only his lantern to show the way. Soon after five o'clock our old host, evidently forgetting that he had such near neighbours, or perhaps imagining that nothing could disturb weary travellers, began to chat with his wife, and before six, one and all of the family party had gone down-stairs. I threw open my casement to find the witchery of last night vanished, cold grey mist enshrouding the delicious little picture, with its grandiose, sombre background. That clinging mist seemed of evil bodement for our expedition. Ought we to start on a long day's river journey in such weather? Yet could we stay?

I confess that there was something eerie in the isolation and remoteness of St. Énimie. Compared to the savagery and desolation of the Causses, it was a little modern Babylon—a corner of Paris, a bit of boulevard and bustle, but with such narrow accommodation, and with such limited means of locomotion at disposal, the prospect of a stay here in bad weather was, to say the least of it, disconcerting. We prepared in any case for a start, made our tea, and packed our bags as briskly as if a bright sun were shining, which true enough it was, although we could not see!

When, soon after seven o'clock, I descended to the kitchen, I found our first party of boatmen busily engaged over their breakfast, and all things in readiness for departure.

"The sun is already shining on the Causse," said our old host. "This mist means fine weather.

Trust me, ladies, you could not have a better day."

We did our best to put faith in such felicitous augury. Punctually at eight o'clock, accompanied by the entire household of the little Hôtel St. Jean, we descended to the landing-place, two minutes' walk only from its doors.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SHOOTING THE RAPIDS

Amid many cordial adieux we took our seats, the good town councillor having placed a well-packed basket at the bottom of the boat. Excellent little restaurants await the traveller at the various stations on the way, but all anxious to arrive at their journey's end in good time will carry provisions with them.

The heavy grey mist hung about the scene for the first hour or two, otherwise it must have been enchanting. Even the cold, monotonous atmosphere could not destroy the grace and smilingness of the opening stage of our journey—sweet Allegro Gracioso to be followed by stately Andante, unimaginably captivating Capricioso to come next—climax of the piece—the symphony closing with gentle, tender harmonies. Thus in musical phraseology may be described the marvellous cañon or gorge of the Tarn. Quiet as the scenery is at the beginning of the way, without any of the sublimer features to awe us farther on, it is yet abounding in various kinds of beauty. Above the pellucid, malachite-coloured river, at first a mere narrow ribbon ever winding and winding, rise verdant banks, tiny vineyards planted on almost vertical slopes, apple orchards, the bright red fruit hanging

over the water's edge, whilst willows and poplars fringe the low-lying reaches, and here and there, a pastoral group, some little Fadette keeps watch over her goats.

The mists rise at last by slow degrees. Soon high above we see the sun gilding the limestone peaks on either side. Very gradually the heavens clear, till at last a blue sky and warm sunshine bring out all the enchantment of the scene.

The river winds perpetually between bright green banks and shining white cliffs. Occasionally we almost touch the mossy rocks of the shore; maiden-hair fern, wild evening primrose, Michaelmas daisy, blue pimpernel and fringed gentian are so near we can almost gather them, and so crystal-clear the untroubled waters, that every object—cliff, tree, and mossy stone—shows its double. We might at times fancy ourselves but a few feet from the pebbly bottom, each stone showing its bright clear outline. The iridescence of the rippling water over the rainbow-coloured pebbles is very lovely.

All is intensely still, only the strident cry of the cicada, or the tinkle of a cattle-bell, and now and then the hoarse note of some wild bird break the stillness.

Before reaching the first stage of our journey the weather had become glorious, and exactly suited to such an expedition. The heavens were now of deep, warm, southern blue; brilliant sunshine lighted up gold-green vineyard, rye-field bright as emerald, apple orchard and silvery parapet on either side.

But these glistening crags, rearing their heads

towards the intense blue sky, these idyllic scenes below, are only a part of what we see. Midway between the verdant reaches of this enchanting river and its sheeny cliffs, by which we glide so smoothly, rise stage upon stage of beauty: now we see a dazzlingly white cascade tumbling over stair after stair of rocky ledge; now we pass islets of greenery perched half-way between river and limestone crest, with many a combe or close-shut cleft bright with foliage running down to the water's edge.

Little paths, laboriously cut about the sides of the Causses on either side, lead to the hanging vineyards, fields and orchards, so marvellously created on these airy heights, inaccessible fastnesses of Nature. And again and again the spectator is reminded of the axiom: "The magic of property turns sands to gold." No other agency could have effected such miracles. Below these almost vertical slopes, raised a few feet only above the water's edge, cabbage and potato beds have been cultivated with equal laboriousness, the soil, what little of soil there is, being very fertile.

On both sides we see many-tinted foliage in abundance: the shimmering white satin-leaved aspen, the dark rich alder, the glossy walnut, yellowing chestnut, and many others.

Few and far between are herdsmen's cottages, now perched on the rock, now built close to the water's edge. We can see their vine-trellised balconies and little gardens, and sometimes pet cats run down to the water's edge to look at us.

And all this time, from the beginning of our

journey to the end, the river winds amid the great walls of the Causses—to our left the spurs of the Causse Méjean; to our right those of Sauveterre. We are gradually realizing the strangeness and sublimity of these bare limestone promontories—here columns white as alabaster—a group having all the grandeur of mountains, yet no mountains at all, their summits vast plateaux of steppe and wilderness, their shelving sides dipping from cloudland and desolation into fairy-like loveliness and fertility.

St. Chély, our first stage, comes to an end in about an hour and a half from the time of leaving St. Énimie. We now change boatmen—punters, I should rather call them. The navigation of the Tarn consists in skilful punting, every inch of the passage being rendered difficult by rocks and shoals, to say nothing of the rapids.

Here our leading punter was a cheery, friendly miller—like the host of the hotel at St. Énimie, a municipal councillor. No better specimen of the French peasant gradually developing into the gentleman could be found. The freedom from coarseness or vulgarity in these amateur boatmen of the Tarn is indeed quite remarkable. Isolated from great social centres and influences of the outer world as they have hitherto been, there is yet no trace either of subservience, craftiness, or familiarity. Their frank, manly bearing is of a piece with the integrity and openness of their dealings with strangers.

A charming château, most beautifully placed, adorns the banks of the river between St. Chély and La Malène. Nowhere could be imagined a

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CHATEAU DE LA CAZE

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THE STONY WILDERNESS

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lovelier holiday resort; no savagery in the scenes around, although all is silent and solitary; park-like bosquets and shadows around; below, long narrow glades leading to the water's edge.

At La Malène, reached about noon, we stop for half-an-hour, and breakfast under the shade. Never before did cold pigeon, and hard-boiled eggs, and household bread taste so delicious! Our bread running short, our boatmen gave us large slices from their own loaf.

On quitting this village, with its fairy-like dells, hanging woods, and lawny spaces, the third and most magnificent stage of our journey is entered upon, the first glimpse preparing us for marvels to come. Smiling above the narrow dark openings in the rock are vineyards of local renown. Here and there a silvery cascade flashes in the distance; then a narrow bend of the river brings us in sight of the frowning crag of Planiol crowned with massive ruins, the stronghold of the sire of Montesquieu, who under Louis XIII arrested the progress of the rebellious Duke de Rohan.

For let it not be supposed that these solitudes have no history. We must go much farther back than the seigneurial crusades of the great Richelieu, or the wholesale exterminations of Merle, the Protestant Alva or Attila, in the religious wars of the Cévennes—farther back even than the Roman occupation of Gaul, when we would describe the townlings of the Causses and the banks of the Tarn. Their story is of more ancient date than any of recorded time. The very Causses, stony, arid wildernesses, so unpropitious to human needs, so

scantily populated in our own day, were evidently inhabited from remote antiquity. Not only have dolmens, tumuli, and bronze implements been found hereabouts in abundance, but also cave-dwellings and traces of the Age of Stone. Prehistoric man was indeed more familiar with the geography of these regions than even learned Frenchmen of to-day. When in 1879 a member of the French Alpine Club asked the well-known geographer Joanne if he could give him any information as to the Causses and the Cañon du Tarn, his reply was the laconic:

"None whatever. Go and see."

It would take weeks, not days, to explore these scenes from the archæological or geological point of view. I content myself with describing what is in store for the tourist.

We now enter the defile or *détroit*, at which point grace and bewitchingness are exchanged for sublimity and grandeur, and the scenery of the Causses and the Tarn reach their acme. The river, narrowed to a thread, winds in and out, forcing laborious way between the lofty escarpments, all but meeting, yet one might almost fancy only yesterday rent asunder.

It is as if two worlds had been violently wrenched apart, the cloven masses rising perpendicularly from the water's edge, in some places confronting each other, elsewhere receding, always of stupendous proportions. What convulsive forces of Nature brought about this severance of vast promontories that had evidently been one? By what marvellous agency did the river force its way between? Some

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cataclysmal upheaval would seem to account for such disrupture rather than the infinitely slow processes suggested by geological history.

Meantime, the little boat glides amid the vertical rocks—walls of crystal spar—shutting in the river, touching as it seems the blue heavens; peak, parapet, ramparts taking multiform hues under the shifting clouds, now of rich amber, now dazzlingly white, now deep purple or roseate. And every one of these lofty shafts, so majestic of form, so varied of hue, is reflected in the transparent green water, the reflections softening the awful grandeur of the reality. Nothing, certes, in nature can surpass this scene; no imagination can prefigure, no pen or pencil adequately portray it. Nor can the future fortunes of the district vulgarize it! The Tarn, by reason of its remoteness, its inaccessibility—and, to descend to material considerations, its expensiveness as an excursion—can never, fortunately, become one of the cheap peep-shows of the world.

The intense silence heightens the impressiveness of the wonderful hour; only the gentle ripple of the water, only the shrill note of the cicada at intervals, breaks the stillness. We seem to have quitted the precincts of the inhabited familiar world, our way lying through the portals of another, such as primeval myth or fairy-tale speak of, stupendous walls of limestone, not to be scaled by the foot or measured by the eye, hemming in our way.

The famous Cirque des Baumes may be described as a double wall lined with gigantic caves and grottoes. Here it is the fantastic and the bizarre that hold the imagination captive. Fairies, but

fairies of eld, of giant race, have surely been making merry here! One and all have vanished; their vast sunlit caverns, opening sheer on to the glassy water, remain intact; high above may their dwellings be seen, airy open chambers under the edge of the cliffs, deep corridors winding right through the wall of rock, vaulted arcades midway between base and peak, whence a spring might be made into the cool waves below. All is still on a colossal scale, but playful, capricious, phantasmagoric.

Nor when we alight at the Pas de Soucis are these features wanting. Here the river, a narrow green ribbon, disappears altogether, its way blocked with huge masses of rock, as of some mountain split into fragments and hurled by gigantic hands from above.

The spectacle recalls the opening lines of the great Promethean drama of the Greek poet. Truly we seem to have reached the limit of the world, the rocky Scythia, the uninhabited desert! The bright sunshine and balmy air hardly soften the unspeakable savagery and desolation of the scene, fitting background for the tragedy of the fallen Fire-giver.

Dominating the whole, as if threatening to fall, adding chaos to chaos, and filling up the vast chasm altogether, are two frowning masses of rock, the one a monolith, the other a huge block. Confronting each other, tottering as it seems on their thrones, we can fancy the profound silence broken at any moment by the crashing thunder of their fall, only that last catastrophe needed to crown the prevailing gloom and grandeur.

At this point we alight, our water-way being blocked for nearly a mile. It is a charming walk to

Les Vignes: to the left we have a continuation of the rocky chaos just described, to the right a path under the shadow of the cliffs, every rift showing maidenhair fern and wild flowers in abundance, fragrant evening primrose, lavender, and fringed gentian. The weather is warm as in July, and of deepest blue the sky above the glittering white peaks. Half-way we meet the rural postman, whose presence reminds us that we are still on the verge of civilization, eerie as is the solitude and desolation around.

At Les Vignes we lose our pleasant, chatty, well-informed young boatmen, the brothers Montginoux, and embark for the fourth and last time. We have now to shoot the rapids.

A boat lay in readiness, two chairs being placed for us, and willow branches in plenty below; our baskets and bundles carefully raised so as to be above water.

We were somewhat disconcerted at the sight of our first boatman, an aged, bent, white-haired man, hardly, one could fancy, vigorous enough, to say nothing of his skill, for the hazardous task of shooting the rapids. He at once informed us that his name was Gall, to whom the first place was given in French guide-books. Even such a piece of information, however, hardly reassured us.

Our misgivings were set at rest by the first glance at his companion.

"My colleague, brother of Monsieur le Maire," said the veteran, presenting him.

A handsome, well-made man in his early prime, with a look of indomitable resolution, and a keen,

eagle-like glance, our second boatman would have inspired confidence under any circumstances, or in any crisis.

How Walt Whitman would have delighted in the manly figure before us, from which his simple peasant's dress could not take an iota of nobility! This French rustic, brother of a village mayor, was endowed by Nature beyond most, the spirit within —there could be no doubt of that—matching an admirable physique. Of middle stature, with regular features and limbs perfectly proportioned, every pose might have served for a sculptor's model, whilst his action to-day sufficiently indicated his fitness for weightier responsibilities and more complex problems. Never shall I forget the study before us during that short journey from Les Vignes to Le Rozier. The old man we could not see, he being behind; his companion stood at the other end of the boat facing the rapids, and having his back turned towards us.

With form erect, feet firmly planted, sinews knit, every faculty under command, he awaited the currents.

It was a soldier awaiting the enemy, the hunter his prey.

The white crests are no sooner in sight than he seizes his pole and stands ready for the encounter.

A moment more and we are in the midst of the eddying, rushing, foaming rapids. We seem to have been plunged from a lake of halcyon smoothness into a storm-lashed sea. Around us the waves rise with menacing force; now our little boat is flooded and tossed like a leaf on the turbulent

waters; every moment it seems that in spite of our brave boatmen we must be dashed against the rocks or carried away by the whirlpool!

But swift and sure he strikes out to the right and to the left, never missing his aim, never miscalculating distances by an inch, till, like an arrow shot by dexterous archer, the little craft reaches the calm. Whilst, indeed, it seems tossed like a shuttlecock on the engulfing waves, it is in reality being most skilfully piloted. The skill of the veteran at the stern was equally remarkable. The two, of course, act in concert, both knowing the river as folks their alphabet.

To each series of currents follows for a while a stretch of glassy water, and we glide on deliciously. It was instructive to watch the figure at the helm then; he laid down his pole, his limbs relaxed, and he indulged in cigarette after cigarette, pausing to point out any object of interest on the way.

The swirling, rushing, eddying currents once more in sight, again he prepared himself for action, and for a few minutes the task became Herculean, the mental strain being equally phenomenal. His keen, swift, unerring glance never once at fault, his rapid movements almost mechanically sure, he plied his pole, whilst lightly as a feather our little boat danced from cascade to cascade, all but touching the huge mossy slabs and projecting islets of rock on either side.

There was wonderful exhilaration in this little journey. We felt that every element of danger was eliminated by the coolness and dexterity of our conductors, yet the sense of hazard and adventuresome-

ness was there! My more stout-hearted companion was a little disappointed, would fain have had even a more exciting experience. It is as well to remind the traveller that these apparently playful rapids are by no means without risks. Several are literally cascades between rocks, hardly allowing space for the boat to pass. Here the least imprudence or want of skill on the part of the boatman might entail the gravest consequences. At one of the points, indeed, a party of tourists very nearly lost their lives some years since, their boatman being unfamiliar with the river.

The scenery changes at every turn. Just as one moment we are in lake-like waters, smooth as a mirror, the next apparently in mid-ocean, so we pass from sweet idyllic scenes into regions of weird sternness and grandeur. Now we glide quietly by shady reaches and sloping hills, alive to the very top with the tinkle of sheep-bells; now we pass under promontories of frowning aspect, that tower two or three thousand feet above the water's edge. The colours of the rock, under the shifting clouds, are very beautiful, and golden, bright and velvety the little belts and platforms of cultivated land to be counted between base and peak. We have to crane our necks in order to catch sight of these truly aerial fields and gardens, all artificially created, all yet again illustrations of the axiom: "The magic of property turns sands to gold."

Truly marvellous is the evidence of this love of the soil in a region so wild and intractable! High above we obtain a glimpse of some ancient village, its scrambling roofs shining amid orchard-trees and

firwoods, or an isolated châlet of goatherd or shepherd breaks some solitude. One ruined château crests the jagged cliffs, a real ruin among the semblances of so many!

Again and again we fancy we can descry crumbling watch-towers, bastions, and donjons on the banks of the Tarn, so fantastic the forms of the Causses on either side.

Soon straight before us, high above the wooded heights that hem us in, rises the Causse Noir—dark, formidable, portentous as the rock of Ishtakhar keeping sentinel over the dread Hall of Eblis, or the Loadstone Mountain of the third Calender's story, which to behold was the mariner's doom. The Causse Noir from the Tarn is a sight not soon forgotten. With black ribs set close about its summit, it wears rather the appearance of a colossal castellation, an enormous fort of solid masonry, than of any natural mass of rock.

What with this spectacle, the excitement of the rapids, the varied landscape, the study of that statuesque figure before us, the brother of M. le Maire, this stage of the way seemed all too short. We regretted—except for the sake of our boatman—that there were not twenty-five more rapids still to be passed before we reached our destination. We regretted, too—who could help it?—that we were not hardy pedestrians, able to clamber amid the rocks overhead, and make that wonderful expedition on foot described by French discoverers of this region, M. Martel, "the Columbus of the nether world," and his fellows. But if the half may not always prove better than the whole in travel, at least

it is better than nothing, and the day's excursion here described had of itself amply repaid the long journey from England.

Sorry, then, were we to come in sight of the bridge spanning the Tarn beyond the village of Le Rozier. Just eight hours after quitting St. Énimie we alighted for the last time, and, following our boatmen, took a winding path that led to the village.

It was a scene of quiet, pastoral beauty that now met our eyes. The Tarn, its sportive mood over, the portals of its magnificent gorge closed, now flows amid sunny hills, quitting the wild Lozère for the more placid Aveyron; immediately around us being little farmsteads, water-mills, and gardens, whilst opposite, like a black thunder-cloud threatening a summer day, the Causse Noir looms in the distance.

THE WINDING TARN

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## CHAPTER XIV

### MONTPELLIER-LE-VIEUX

After a day of gloom and downpour the weather became again perfect—no burning sun, no cold wind; instead, we had a pearly heaven with shifting sunlight and cloud, and the softest air.

The carriage-roads of the Lozère are a good preparation for ascending Mont Blanc or the Eiffel Tower.

Here we seem to be perpetually going up or coming down in a balloon; and to persons afflicted with giddiness, each day's excursion, however delightful, takes the form of a nightmare when one's head rests on the pillow. For days, nay, weeks after these drives on the "Roof of France," my sleep was haunted with giddy climbs and still giddier descents. It was the price I had to pay for some of the most glowing experiences of my much-travelled life. The journey to Montpellier-le-Vieux formed no exception to the rule. Happy, thrice happy, those who can foot it merrily all the way!

The pedestrian has by far the easier task. Throughout the two hours' drive thither, and the somewhat shorter journey back, the horses had to crawl at a snail's pace, their hoofs being within an inch or two of the steep incline as the sharp curves

of the corkscrew road are turned. The road in many places is very rough and encumbered with stones; and there is a good deal of clambering to be done at the last. Let none but robust travellers therefore undertake this expedition, whether by carriage or on foot.

Our landlord drove us, much to our satisfaction; his horses, steadiest of the steady, his little dog trotting beside us, sniffing the air joyously, as if he too were a tourist in search of exhilaration and adventure.

Over against Le Rozier, towering high above Peyreleau, its twin village, rises a sharp pyramidal spur of the Causse Noir, its shelving sides running vertically down. That mountain wall, impracticable as it seems, we have to scale.

The road cut so marvellously round it is excellent, wild lavender scenting the way. As we wind slowly upwards we see an old bent woman filling a sack with the flowery spikes for sale. Thus the Causse, not in one sense but many, is the bread-winner of the people. We follow this zigzag path westward, leaving behind us sunny slopes covered with peach-trees, vineyards, gardens and orchards, till flourishing little Le Rozier and its neglected step-sister, Peyreleau, are hidden deep below, dropped, as it seems, into the depths of a gulf.

An hour's climb and we are on the plateau, where the good road is quitted, and we take a mere cart-track between pastures, rye-fields, and woods of Scotch fir. So uneven and blocked with stones is the road here, that the poorest walker will soon be glad to get down. The deliciousness of the air, and

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MONTPELLIER-LE-VIEUX

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the freshness of the scenery, however, soon make us insensible to bodily fatigue. Every minute we obtain wider and grander horizons, the three Causses being now in view, their distant sides shining like gigantic walls of crystal; deep blue shadows here and there indicating the verdant clefts and valleys we know of. All lightness and glitter are the remoter surfaces; all warm colour and depth of tone the nearer undulations. What a wealth of colour, what incomparable effects for an artist!

The prospect now increases in wildness, and we seem gradually to leave behind the familiar world. We are again in the midst of a stony wilderness, but a wilderness transformed into a fairy region of beauty and charm.

Nothing can be softer, more harmonious, more delicate than the soft grey tints of the limestone against the pure heaven; every bit of rock being tapestried with the yellowing box leaf, or made more silvery still with the flowers of the wild lavender.

East, west, north, south, the lines of billowy curves in the far distance grow vaster, till we come in sight of what seems indeed a colossal city towering westward over the horizon; a city well built, girt round with battlements, bristling with watch-towers, outlined in gold and amethyst upon a faint azure sky.

It is our first glimpse of Montpellier-le-Vieux.

The jolting now becomes excessive; we leave our carriage, conductor and little dog to follow a traverse leading to Maubert, the farmhouse and auberge where are to be had guides, food, and bedchambers for those who want them.

We could not miss the way, our driver said, and woe betide us if we had done so. We seem already to have found the city of rocks, the famous Cité du Diable; so labyrinthine these streets, alleys, and *impasses* of natural stone, so bewildering the chaos around us. For my own part, I could not discern the vestige of a path, but my more keen-eyed companion assured me that we were on the right track, and her assertion proved to be correct. After a laborious picking of our path amid the pêle-mêle of jumbled stones, we did at last, and to our great joy, catch sight of a bit of wall. This was Maubert; a square, straggling congeries of buildings approached from behind, and of no inviting aspect. A dunghill stood in front of the house, and hens, pigs, and the friendliest dogs in the world disported themselves where the flower-garden ought to have been. At first the place seemed altogether deserted. We knocked, shouted, ran hither and thither in vain. By and by crawled forth, one after the other, three ancient, witch-like women, staring at us and mumbling words we could not understand. On nearer inspection they seemed worthy old souls enough, evidently members of the household; but as their amount of French was scant, they hurried indoors again. A few minutes later a young, handsome, untidy housewife popped her head from an upper window, and seeing that we were tourists, immediately came down-stairs to welcome us.

She would send for her husband to act as guide at once, she said; in the meantime, would we breakfast?

The farmhouse, turned into a hostelry, only re-

quired a little outlay and cosmopolitan experience to be transformed into quite a captivating health resort. If, indeed, health is not to be recruited on these vast, flower-scented heights, nearly three thousand feet above the sea-level, swept clean by the pure air of half-a-dozen mountain chains, where may we hope to find invigoration?

Even now non-fastidious tourists may be fairly comfortable. A large, perfectly wholesome upper dining-room; bedrooms containing excellent beds; a farmhouse ordinary with game in abundance; courteous, honest hosts, and one of the marvels of the natural world within a stroll—surely scores of worn-out brain workers would regard Maubert as a paradise, in spite of trifling drawbacks.

We found a pleasant young French tourist with his blue-bloused guide eating omelettes in the *salle-à-manger*. Soon the master of the house came up—a young man of perhaps twenty-five—as well favoured as his wife, and much neater in appearance. This youthful head of the family possesses a large tract of Causse land, besides owning in great part what may prove in the future—is, indeed, already proving—a mine of wealth, an El Dorado, namely, the city of rocks, Montpellier-le-Vieux.

We now set out, our host, whilst quite ready to talk, possessing all the dignity and reserve of the Lozérien mountaineer. As we sauntered through patches of oats, rye, potatoes, and hay, I obtained a good deal of information about rural affairs.

Chatting thus pleasantly, we come nearer and nearer the city, painted in violet tints against an azure sky, to find it, as we approach, a splendid

phantasmagoria. What we deemed citadels, domes and parapets, proved to be the silvery dolomite only: limestone rock thrown into every conceivable form, the imposing masses blocking the horizon; the shadow of a mighty Babylon darkening the heaven; but a Babylon untenanted from its earliest beginning—a phantom capital, an eldritch city, whose streets at last echo with the sound of human voice and tread!

I do not know how Montpellier-le-Vieux would look on a dull, grey day; doubtless imagination would people it then with gnomes, horrid afrits, and shapes of fear. To-day, under an exquisite sky, pearly clouds floating across the blue, a soft southern air wafting the fragrance of wild pink, thyme and lavender, it was a region surely peopled by good genii, sportive elves and beneficent fairies only. We were in a phantasmal world; but a world of witchery and poetic thrall.

The Cité du Diable unfolds its marvels all at once, as soon as the traveller has entered its precincts. Before us rose the colossal citadel so-called, pyramid upon pyramid of rock, which our guide said we must positively climb, the grandest panorama being here obtained; a bit of a scramble, he added, but a mere bagatelle, the affair of a few minutes only.

We were at the foot of a chaotic wall of enormous blocks, piled one upon the other, with deep, ugly fissures between—the height, from base to summit, that of St. Paul's Cathedral. In order to reach even the lower platform of these superimposed masses it was necessary to be hoisted up after the

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manner of travellers ascending the Pyramids, only with this disadvantage—that holding on to the rocks where any hold was possible, and planting the feet as firmly as was practicable on the almost vertical sides—we had here to bestride chasm after chasm.

The climbing, beyond a somewhat breathless scrambling and painful straining of the limbs, was nothing to speak of. For a few moments I could revel in the marvellous spectacle before me.

Lying on a little platform, perhaps two yards square, under the bright heavens, I had, far around and beneath, the wide panorama of the dolomite city, vista upon vista of tower and monolith, avenues, arches, bridges, arcades, all of cool, tender grey amid fairy-like verdure and greenery. Not Lyons itself, seen from the heights of La Fourvière, shows a more grandiose aspect than this capital of the waste, unpeopled by either the living or the dead!

Hardly had I realized the magic of the prospect when I became conscious of frightful giddiness. The flowery shelf of rock on which I lay was only a foot or two removed from the edge of the piled mass just climbed so laboriously, and, sloping downwards, seemed to invite a fall. From this side the incline was almost vertical, and the turf below at a distance of over a hundred feet. No descent was practicable except by bestriding the same fissures, two feet wide, and clinging to the sides of the rocks, as before. I now felt that terrible vertigo which I am convinced accounts for so many so-called suicides from lofty heights. To throw myself down seemed the only possible relief from the terrible

nightmare. Had I been longer alone I must, at least, have allowed myself to slip off my resting-place, with certain risk to life and limb. As it was, I called to my companion, who had scaled another storey—had, indeed, reached the topmost shelf of the citadel; and she tripped down looking so airy and alert that I felt ashamed of my own weakness.

Reassuring me as best he could, our guide now grasped one of my hands, with the other got a strong grip of the rock, and the first dreaded step was achieved. The second presented greater difficulties still. Once more he tried to carry me, but found the task beyond his strength. So, shutting out the prospect beneath, I allowed myself to be dragged down somehow, never more to venture on such giddy heights. The incomparable view had been dearly purchased.

All had ended well, however, and I could once more enjoy the scene. When the first bewilderment of wonder and admiration is over; when the fantastic city no longer appears a vision, but a reality, pile upon pile of natural rock so magically cast in the form of architecture, we realize countless beauties unperceived at first. The intense limpidity and crystalline clearness of the atmosphere, the brilliance of the limestone, the no less dazzling hue of the foliage everywhere adorning it, the beautiful lights and shadows of the more distant masses, line upon line of far-off mountain chain, mere gold and violet clouds rising above the rugged outline of the Causses, the deep, rich tones of the nearer—these general effects are not more striking than the details close under our feet. About every fragment of rock

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LE SPHINX

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is a wealth of leaves, flowers and berries, the dog-wood and bilberry with their crimson and purple clusters and tufts, wild lavender and thrift, whilst the ground is carpeted with the leaf of the hepatica.

We found also the pretty purple and white toad-flax,[1] the handsome gold-flowered spurges,[2] the elegant orange and crimson-streaked salvia,[3] with others more familiar to us. If the adorer of wild flowers is a happy person here in September, what enchantment would await him in the spring! Like the Russian Steppes and the African Metidja, these wastes are then a mosaic of blossom. The foot-sure, hardy and leisurely traveller must not content himself with the bird's-eye view of this dolomite city just described. He should spend hours, nay, days here, if he would conscientiously explore the stone avenues, worthy to be compared to Stone-henge or Carnac; the amphitheatre, vast as that of Nîmes or Orange; the fortifications, with bulwarks, towers, and ramparts; the necropolis, veritable Cerameicus, or Père-la-Chaise; the citadel, the forum, the suburbs; for the enthusiastic discoverers of Montpellier-le-Vieux, or the Cité du Diable, have made out all these.

The most striking rocks have been fancifully named after the celebrated structures they resemble. We find the Château Gaillard, the Sphinx, the Gate of Mycenæ, or of the Lions, the Street of Tombs supposed to resemble Pompeii, all of colossal dimensions. Thus the citadel measures a hundred

[1] *Linaria versicolor.*
[2] *Euphorbia sylvatica* and *E. cyparissea.*
[3] *Salvia glutinosa.*

and fifty feet from the ground, at this point Montpellier-le-Vieux attaining an altitude of two thousand five hundred feet above the sea-level. When I add that the Cité du Diable measures nearly two miles in length and a mile in breadth, and that its city and suburbs, so-called, cover a thousand hectares, an area a third less than that of Windsor Forest, the enterprising tourist will have some feeble notion of the waste before him. The place is indeed altogether indescribable—surely one of the most striking testimonies to the force of erosion existing on the earth's surface. The explanation of the phenomenon is found here. At a remote period of geological history the action of mighty torrents let loose sculptured these fantastic and grandiose monoliths, bored these arcades and galleries, hollowed these fairy-like caves. Erosion has been the architect of the Cité du Diable, partly by impetuous floods, partly by slow filtration. Water has gradually, and in the slow process of ages, built up the whole, then vanished altogether. Nothing strikes the imagination more than the absolute aridity of the region now. Not a drop left in the bed of ancient lake or river, not a crystal thread trickling down the rock channelled by ancient cascades, and nevertheless abundance of greenery and luxuriant foliage everywhere! The waterless world of stone is not only a garden, but a green forest! Immediately around us flowers, ferns, and shrubs adorn every bit of silvery-grey rock, whilst wherever space admits we see noble trees, pines, oaks, beeches, some of marvellous growth, yet perched on heights so remote and lofty as to appear mere tufts of grass.

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And then the wonderful deliciousness and invigorating quality of the air! Like tasting the waters of the Nile, it is an experience never to be forgotten.

Those, indeed, who have once breathed the air of the Lozère will have only one desire: to breathe it again.

True, Montpellier-le-Vieux, departmentally speaking, is in the Aveyron, if so phantom-like a city can be said to have a local habitation and a name. But the Lozère chain is still in sight; its breezes are wafted to us; we seem still in what is perhaps the most picturesque department of the eighty-seven.

The fine prospect framing in Montpellier-le-Vieux is best appreciated as we walk back to the farm, our mind not then being full of expectancy. What a suberb *coup d'œil!* Distance upon distance, one mountain range rising above another, almost in endless succession, the various stages showing infinite gradation of colour—subtle, distracting, absolutely unpaintable! No wonder the air is unspeakably fresh and exhilarating, seeing that it blows north, south, east and west from lofty Alps. We have in view the sombre walls of the three Causses, the wide outline of the Larzac, in a vast semicircle the western spurs of the Cévennes, whilst from east to west stretch the Cantal chain.

The drive back to Le Rozier is another balloon descent from the clouds. With St. Énimie, the little town lies, figuratively speaking, at the bottom of a well, and as we approach we could almost drop a plummet-line on to the house-tops. It is a dizzy drive, and many will shut their eyes as their horses'

hoofs turn the sharp curves of the precipitous mountain sides, only an inch or two between wheel and precipice.

The road between Le Rozier and Millau is delightful, the verdure and brilliance of valley being in striking contrast with the dark-ribbed Causse Noir frowning above. For two-thirds of the way we follow the Tarn as it winds—here a placid stream—amid poplars, willows, and smooth green reaches. Gracious and lovely the shifting scenes of the landscape around, stern and magnificent of aspect the Causse, its ramparts as of iron girding it round, its gloomy escarpments showing deep clefts and combes, lines of purply gold and green breaking the grey surface.

Close under this mighty shadow—a bit of fairyland by the dwelling of evil genii—are sunny little lawns, peach-groves, orchards, and terraced villages.

As we approach Millau we meet streams of country folk disporting themselves, some afoot, others in rustic vehicles, the men wearing clean blue blouses over the Sunday broadcloth, the women neat black gowns, kerchiefs, and spotless white coiffes. The fields are deserted. Man and beast are resting from the labours of the week.

The landscape now changes altogether, and we are reminded that we have quitted the Lozère for the Aveyron. The air has lost the matchless purity and exhilarating briskness of Sauveterre and Montpellier-le-Vieux. Alike sky, atmosphere, and vegetation recall the south. Pink and white oleanders bloom before every door; the quince, the mulberry, the peach, ripen in every garden. We long to get

CATHEDRAL, RODEZ

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at our boxes and exchange woollen travelling-dresses for cottons and muslins.

Pleasant and welcome as is this soft air, this warm heaven, this bright, rich-coloured, flowery land, we strain our eyes to get a last glimpse of the Causse Noir. To betake ourselves to cosmopolitan hotels, cities and railways, after this sojourn in elfdom, was like closing the pages of the *Arabian Nights* or the *Fables of Pilpay* for a newspaper!

As yet, however, we were far from conventionalities. I had set my heart upon revisiting Rodez and Vic-sur-Cère; once again, therefore, I circumambulated to Clermont-Ferrand; this time, however, not halting at Aurillac, a centre of the Cantal *fromagerie*, or cheese-making, and from that point of view chiefly interesting.

Rodez is superbly situated on a lofty, sunny plateau, surrounded by hills and far mountain chains; but between these and the city, which is almost encircled by the Aveyron, lies a broad belt of fertile country, the soil of a deep claret colour.

Just as Venice should be approached by sea at dawn, so all travellers should reach Rodez at sunset.

Never shall I forget the first enchanting view of its glorious cathedral that September afternoon of the year before, the three-storeyed tower of flamboyant Gothic dominating the vast landscape, the rich red stone flushed to a warmer dye, the noble masonry of the whole glowing with the lustre and solidity of copper against the clear heavens.

This lofty, triple-terraced tower is called the marvel of Southern France, and no wonder. The cathedral of Antwerp itself is not more captivatingly

lightsome and lovely. High above the ancient city, with its encompassing river and wide-stretched plain, confronting the far-off mountains, almost on a level with their summits, visible from afar as a lighthouse in mid-ocean, rises this belfry of Rodez.

Certain places, as well as certain individualities, exercise extraordinary fascination. The old capital of Rouergne, and later of the Comté of Rodez, is one. Many and many a French city I have visited of far greater architectural and historic importance; Poitiers among these, Troyes is another; yet I should never go out of my way to revisit Poitiers or Troyes, whilst certain other French cities I have visited year after year. Great was my delight to find a new, cheerful, spick-and-span hotel, that had been opened since my former visit. The time-honoured house of Biney has two credentials worthy of mention—very low charges and good food. Its modern rival has greater claims upon the wayfarer's gratitude—pleasant, wholesome rooms, neat chambermaids, and the kind of modernization so necessary to health and comfort. The Hôtel Flouron, too, was presided over by a lady, and when we have said this we have implied a good deal.

A grand old town is the capital of the Aveyron. We must see it again and again to realize its superb position and the unique splendour of its cathedral, towering over the wide landscape as our own Ely Cathedral over the eastern plains. To-day it was not flushed with the flaming red and gold of sunset, as when first gazed at by me, but its aspect was perhaps all the more grandiose for sombre colouring.

From both extremities of the town we obtain vast

panoramas, looking down as if from a mountain top; the plateau or isthmus on which Rodez stands being two hundred and fifty feet above the circumjacent plain, the river Aveyron almost cutting it off from the mainland.

Vic-sur-Cère, our next halting-place, is an earthly paradise, a primitive Eden, as yet unspoiled by fashion and utilitarianism.

When we arrived, we had the entire place to ourselves—inn, river-side walks, and dazzlingly green hills. No palm island in mid-Pacific could offer a sweeter, more pastoral halting-place. It is indeed a perfect little corner of earth, beauty of the quiet kind here reaching its acme; and neither indoors nor abroad is there any drawback to mar the traveller's enjoyment.

From the windows of our hotel, close to the station, we enjoy a prospect absolutely flawless; Nature in one of her daintiest moods is here left to herself. The inn stands amid its large vegetable, fruit and flower gardens; looking beyond these, we see the prettiest little town imaginable nestled in a beautiful valley, around it rising romantic crags, wooded heights, and gentle slopes, fresh and verdant as if the month were May. Through the smooth meadows between the encompassing hills winds the musically-named stream, the Iraliot, and from end to end the broad expanse of green is scented with newly-mown hay. The delightful scenery, the purity of the air, the excellent quality of the waters, ought to turn Vic-sur-Cère into a miniature Vichy. Fortunately for us, such had not as yet been the case, and the simple, straightforward

character of the people was still unspoiled by contact with the outer world. "Everybody can get a livelihood here," we were told by an intelligent resident; "only the idle, the drunkard, and the thriftless need come to want."

Vagrancy is altogether absent; the children are neatly dressed and very clean; the men and women have all a look of cheerful independence as they toil on their little farms or mind their small flocks and herds.

How kindly the good folks of the homely Hôtel du Pont welcomed their guest of the year before, filling my basket at departure with gifts of flowers, fruit, and little cheeses, begging me to return the following summer!

With what reluctance we bade them farewell and took train to Clermont-Ferrand!

# PART III

# FROM CLERMONT-FERRAND TO LA ROCHELLE, NANTES AND ANGERS

## CHAPTER XV

### ROUND ABOUT CLERMONT-FERRAND

ENCIRCLED by pleasant green hills and purple volcanic ranges, with leisurely breathing space around its dark grey cathedral towering high above gloomy piles of masonry, this sombre city wears perpetual mourning amid a bright and glowing landscape. The *pierre de Volvic*, or grey lava of which it is built has, however, for artistic eyes, a strange fascination, whether seen from near or afar. Not on the most dazzling midsummer day are the eyes of the tourist blinded by glare here, and the harmonious greys of the building stone is relieved everywhere by that picturesque window-gardening so well understood in France.

Nowhere is the art carried to greater perfection than at Clermont, where the humblest attic-dormer is turned into a flowery nook, and where, with two or three bits of wood nailed together, the poorest contrives to transform his *grenier* window into a bower of blossoms and greenery, delighting all eyes. This passion for flowers vanquishes all difficulties, small and great. The wayside cobbler, whose tenement is a mere shed, contrives by means of a trellised bean or convolvulus, and, may be, a pot or two of carnation, to brighten and beautify his poor dwelling; the small shopkeeper turns the

angle of his doorway into a rockery, twines his climbing plants around his wooden lattice, and, once there, they go on blooming all the summer.

Above on the airiest perch, below on the street pavement, midway making of each balcony a garden terrace, are to be found flowers and foliage, the glorious roseate oleander and creamy magnolia being the favourites of richer flower-lovers. There are streets in Clermont which positively remind you of river-banks in Algeria, so unbroken is the flush of rose-pink afforded by oleanders in rich bloom.

All the plants are, of course, in pots, and removed in winter.

If, as Lucretius wrote, and Menander before him, "It is pleasant from a distance to contemplate the sea, being free from the dangers of sailing on its waves," a more certain and disinterested joy arises from the contemplation of fatiguing, hazardous exploits performed in our halcyon days. To have footed an upward climb of sixteen hundred feet may appear a bagatelle hardly worth noting to the Alpinist, but to ordinary folks—especially folks whose "breathing time of the day" is limited to an hour or two's stroll on the level—it is a positive achievement, a life-long elation.

It was early in August 1878 that for the first time I visited Clermont-Ferrand, enjoying till my departure, a month later, unbroken tropical weather. Joining a dear young friend—alas! no more—whose husband was in garrison at the city, and whose brother, a medical student, had gone thither for his vacation, I made one of a delightful family party.

Of course, no one visits Clermont without making

the ascent of the Puy de Dôme (4,805 feet). Let the weather be tropic, arctic, or Scotch, to the top of that mountain you must go.

I was favoured both as to weather and company, the day chosen for our excursion being just perfect, and my companion, the young medical student before named, instructed, charming, now a consulting physician in Paris with an almost grown-up son, and still my fast friend. At eight o'clock we started in an open carriage, taking our breakfast with us, and both disposed to make the most of our day's pleasure.

What a wonderful drive is that from the volcanic built city to the base of the great volcanoes which emitted flame and fire before the first cavemen were making their flint instruments in Dordogne! The æons of time we have to go over in our minds before arriving at the life of these extinct volcanoes takes one's breath away! It is supposed by some geologists that the great volcanic epoch of Central France was coeval with the formation of the Alps; and yet although the active period is lost in the past cycles of time, on every side we have traces of it; we might indeed, from the scoriæ and cinders scattered about the base of the volcanoes, imagine ourselves in the proximity of Mount Vesuvius.

On this uphill drive we soon get a fine view of Clermont, with its grand old cathedral rising proudly and gloomily above the city. Winding slowly upward amid cornfields, vineyards, and rocky banks, we gradually obtain a clearer view of the country, and the majestic outline of the Puy de Dôme, with its twin dome, of which the proverb says—

"Si Dôme était sur Dôme,
On verrait les portes de Rome."

It is a laborious two hours' zigzag for the horses to the base of the mountain, each turn giving finer views of the volcanic ranges before us—the distant plain of La Limagne and far-away outlines of the dim Cévennes.

To my thinking these panoramic mountain ranges, to-day blue and vapoury as cloudland, are lovelier than Switzerland. On reaching the halting-place, we decided at once to mount; and all travellers here should follow our example, carrying their breakfast to the mountain top with them. By this arrangement the heat of the meridian sun and much extra fatigue is avoided. A superb climb we had, brilliant sunshine, cloudless sky, but a fresh, invigorating air.

The sides of the Puy at this season are covered with a great variety of wild flowers, yellow foxgloves, the large yellow gentian, deliciously fragrant fringed dianthus of all shades, from the delicatest rose pink to the deepest rose, everywhere the air being sweet with them; then there are great varieties of exquisite heaths and campanulas, and lovely little deep orange potentillas and hawkweeds. Nothing is more delightful than to stand below one of the sharp ridges of the Puy, rising boldly against the deep-blue sky; and from lofty summit to base, you see fringes of exquisite flowers, their fragility and brightness contrasting strikingly with the rugged sombreness and severity of the mountain. All around us lie masses of scoriæ, reminding us that we are among the great extinct volcanoes of

Central France. Looking down on the line of the Dômes below, we see clearly enough the shape of the original craters, that of the Puy de Pariou being conspicuous.

We bivouacked on a breezy hill-side, and breakfasted in the highest spirits, myself feeling no less frisky than my youthful companion. How well I remember the excellent flavour of the light wine alternately drunk from his folding leather drinking-cup! And the cold chicken and fruit and new bread, did ever such viands have so excellent a taste!

Meantime party after party of tourists followed us, and the broad summit soon wore the aspect of a vast picnic. The atmosphere was transparent enough for us to make out the different features of the wonderful panorama around us—the vast range of the Dômes, the Mont Dore and the Pic de Sancy towering above the rest; southward the Velay and the Cévennes, eastward the Jura range, westward Clermont with its environment of vine-clad hills and villages dotted here and there, farther westward still, the plain of Limagne. My companion told me that, when on this spot a few years before, he had found among the Roman ruins Gallo-Roman coins and fragments of pottery. Now nothing is to be obtained by the most persistent searcher. It is the geologist who will especially find interest and occupation here.

At the little restaurant attached to the State observatory, we saw a dozen or more superb St. Bernard dogs. These noble creatures enjoy entire indolence at this season of the year, but during the

winter—which often lasts from September till April —they are occupied, as in Switzerland, with the rescue of snow-bound travellers.

Resting here a while, we talked of the great Pascal who at twelve worked out the problems of Euclid by himself, and on this spot made his tremendous discoveries; later in life to be "twice converted," from which periods dated the gloom and sacerdotalism darkening his life and hastening his end. His mediævalism went so far that in his later years he wore a spiked girdle pressing into his flesh when tempted to pleasant thoughts!

Our descent after this halt was easy and pleasant enough, and we could afford to look with a superior air on those ill-advised travellers who had first stayed to breakfast below, and were now toiling upward in the heat of the day, hot and dispirited.

"Is it much higher?" they asked of us, as we jauntily skipped down, and we were bound to shake our heads solemnly and answer in the affirmative. At every turn we were obliged to pause and admire the delicate beauty of the mountain sides, velvety green, and fringed with the loveliest crimson and rose-coloured pinks, filling the air with fragrance.

On our arrival at the starting-place we found many family groups breakfasting under the trees. The ascent was evidently a favourite excursion, not only to the rich, but of all classes, some making it bravely on foot from Clermont.

I do not know why the Puy de Dôme should be my favourite mountain, but so it is. Never did it look lovelier than when ten years later I looked back from the train on my way to Lyons, as with its sister

VIEW FROM THE PUY DE DÔME

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volcanoes, pyramid upon pyramid of warm purple, it towered above the green Limagne; gradually the lower heights receded from view, at last nothing was left but that solitary dome of amethyst under the golden heaven.

Thiers, the *Ville Noire* of George Sand's perfect little novel so called, should be visited by all sojourners at Clermont-Ferrand. The railway takes you thither in an hour and a half, and you come upon it suddenly at the last. Never surely was a little town of knife-grinders and scissors-makers so superbly situated! Its site is worthy of a Granada or at least of a cathedral city. Instead, however, of cresting spires and noble towers, these grand heights, commanding the vast Limagne, are crowned with modest cottage *ornés* of retired or flourishing artisans; whilst sheer below—you might almost drop a plummet line from the upper town to the lower—are massed together busy workshops beside a rocky ravine, amid which curls and tosses an ink-black little river, turning thousands of mill-wheels as it goes. George Sand well christened Thiers the Black Town, for it is as black as black can be, its prevailing inkiness being all the more striking by comparison with the velvety green and gold framework of vineyard and garden. The building materials, whatever may have been their original colour, are now besooted with the smoke of successive ages; the river rushes by Tartarean as these, whilst the toilers, alike men, women and children, are begrimed with the dust of their smelting-fires and grinding-wheels. In the upper town, therefore, the stranger finds himself amid such warm blue skies

and gold-green luxuriance as call up a vision of the Homeric Islands of the Blest, whilst lower down he finds narrow little streets into which the sun cannot penetrate in the longest days of the year, veritable dens of Vulcan and the Cyclops.

We see just such luxuriant vineyards and glades anywhere in France; but where shall we find a place so matchlessly black, weird, and picturesque as this capital of knife-grinders?

Descending from the railway station and the hills, whence we have a vast prospect of the plain, the range of the Mont Dore, the Dômes, with Clermont-Ferrand below, and dozens of townlets and villages scattered amid the cornfields and vineyards, we may take any one of the score of little streets, steep as ladders placed against a wall, to the Ville Noire below. Each and every one of these precipitous descents conduct us from the open heavens and broad landscape warm with sunshine to subterranean, almost preternatural darkness, animated with the sound of a thousand hammers and mill-wheels. Only on the topmost storeys of these gloomy factories are seen scarlet-runners and ivy, in sunny openings even roses and geraniums, pathetic bits of window gardening.

Immediately bordering the dwarf and foamy Tartarus we see more caverns, picturesque in effect, the funereal background relieved by the glow of the smithy. Here all day long sit men and women polishing knife- and scissor-blades, wearing a strange look of dignity and patience. Outside the town are pleasant open spaces where the aged sun themselves and the bantlings play amid flowers and

THIERS

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trees. As elsewhere throughout France, toil has here a cheerful side.

Another ancient little town is Mont-Ferrand, so imposingly crowned by its fine church that from the railway it might be taken for some small cathedral city. Like Clermont, it is lava-built and sombre to the eye. Formerly a rival of Clermont itself, relics of its vanished splendour still remain to charm the sketcher—rich old Renaissance hotels, dilapidated it may be, yet both within and without abounding in massive sculptures and elaborate decorations; inner courts with winding stone staircases, having open embrasures, carved portals and pinnacles, each decayed dwelling-place still bearing its owner's arms and heraldic decorations over the principal entrance. These are now let off in tenements to the very poorest, and as you wander through the streets of Mont-Ferrand, do not fail to follow the first witchlike-looking old woman who beckons you within. She is certain to have some delightfully picturesque interior to show you, and will feel amply rewarded by the gift of a few sous. As she mouths and mumbles in the incomprehensible patois of the country, and is of weird aspect, you may hesitate; but follow boldly, and she will not fail to give you more than your money's worth.

At the time of which Fléchier wrote his entertaining and instructive volume, *Les Grands Jours d'Auvergne*, Clermont and Mont-Ferrand appear to have been of almost equal importance, for he describes the site of a country-house placed midway between the two thus: "We see from it in the distance two towns which seem there placed on purpose

to do honour to this spot." Mont-Ferrand is now a mere suburban village.

On this Sunday afternoon all the world, having attended mass in the morning, was out disporting itself. An annual fair was being held here, and we met streams of pedestrians and all kinds of cumbersome old vehicles bringing in peasants from remote districts. And as a background to this animated scene, to rejoice our eyes, were the sloping vineyards around, beyond these the great mountain range of Central France, palest violet against a cool grey sky.

Riom is another charming little town of quite another kind within easy reach of Clermont. Here all is exquisite cleanliness, trimness, and even elegance.

Despite its many attractions, Clermont-Ferrand is not one of my *Lieblings Oerter*, or favourite spots, as the Germans say. It is a dreary city, and the townsfolk have not the traditional engagingness of their nation. Strangers are regarded as so many *additions* or addings-up of hotel and restaurant proprietors; not, as elsewhere, in the light of welcome guests. The place fascinates, but with an eeriness that forbids regret at bidding it farewell. Here, however, this important link in my long round could not be passed over.

ÉGLISE D'ARS, ÎLE DE RÉ

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## CHAPTER XVI

### TO NANTES BY WAY OF BORDEAUX, LA ROCHELLE, LES SABLES D'OLONNE, AND MONTAIGU

From Clermont-Ferrand the traveller may continue his round, some of the most wonderful sites and cities in all France being taken by the way—Limoges, Périgneux, with its mosque-like cathedral —not omitting thence to visit the island-town of Brantôme—Brive, starting-point for Rocamadour and the underground lakelets and rivers of Padirac, —still continuing in a south-westerly direction till he reaches Bordeaux.

The first-named sites I have fully described elsewhere, and the great seaport of the Gironde, in which I have spent enchanted days, does not come within my present venue.

One impression, however, is given here. Whenever found possible, we should betake ourselves to water-ways in France, only by this means can we realize the immense variety of its aspects. Every city, town or townling may be made a centre of excursions by water, and where steamers and boats are not available, there are the barges. By canals alone, a delightful if somewhat leisurely survey of the entire country is possible, barge-folk being very hospitable to accredited strangers.

Whilst at Bordeaux the lover of the grandiose

will do well to take one of the little steamers plying between the city and Lormont, five miles lower down on the opposite bank of the river. By this means a rapid but unforgettable view is obtained of the noble sea-front of Bordeaux—none in the world nobler, it is said by those able to judge—three miles of handsome quays, crowded with shipping, flags of all nations flying from the masts, proudly dominating all the superb clock towers of the cathedral and St. Michel. The well-filled little steamer dashes away at an astonishingly rapid rate: soon the great panorama of the majestic city, bridge and spires and housetops fade into mere silhouette—delicate amber pencillings against the soft golden sky.

We glide past quays and quays, passing close under the keel of many a noble vessel at anchor—now one of the magnificent steamers, carrying a thousand passengers, that trade between Bordeaux and the Brazils; now a timber-bearing vessel from Norway; now we see the familiar Union Jack floating over some more modern craft from Liverpool.

And crowded as are these vessels, one against the other, the broad, swift-flowing Gironde has room enough for all. As we approach Lormont, where it widens out to meet the sea, the current becomes more rapid still—it seems as if the steamer were hurried on against its will.

The green slopes of the country here entice to a climb, and fine views are obtained from the top. But we arrived only just in time to catch the last boat returning to Bordeaux that evening. Instead of a panorama lighted up by sunset glow, however, we saw something equally beautiful. The full

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moon—the moon of the Gironde—no silvery splendour, but a ball of fire—rose in glory, and the effect on every feature of the scene was magical. Mast, keel, figure-head of the vessels passed by, stood out in dark relief against the blue, translucent heavens, the river shone steely bright; whilst the quays, bristling with masts, and the dimly outlined city made up a background mysterious and imposing.

From Bordeaux, seat not only of shipping and commerce, but of art, music, and the finest cookery in the world, the traveller may take rail or river to Rozan, and sweet little Georges-de-Didonne. That once primitive resort, rendered famous by Michelet in *La Mer*, having been described by me elsewhere, I will pass on to La Rochelle. In the dog days how delightful the blooming gardens, cool, antique arcades, freshness and shadow of this most beautiful old city! The place reminds me of the quaint, stately Italian towns so little changed by time and progress.

On the hottest day of the year you may stroll under its dusky porches as agreeably as if it were spring; and when you quit these pleasant promenades, can still find shelter in the suburban-like streets, with large gardens offering shelter to the passer-by. All is quiet, harmonious, mediæval; and the aspect of the Rochellois is in accordance with the staid yet cheerful antiquity of the place.

Whichever way you turn you come upon some sign of ancient times; and nowhere in my travels have I seen more beautiful old houses than these, with their harmonious grey walls, pointed roofs, carved corbels, projecting gargoyles, and arched

windows. As yet—at the time of my visit—no wholesale demolition had been carried on here, and the new quarters had been built in keeping with the old. People live after English fashion, each in their own house or hotel, so called; and through the half-open front door I caught glimpses of creepers, trees, and flowers, giving a cheerful and rural aspect to the streets.

It is a delicious little sea-trip of an hour and a half to the Île de Ré—a half-Eastern, half-Italian island, formerly covered with wood, but now entirely cleared, and devoted partly to vineyards and partly to market-gardens. The figs and pears are celebrated, and are exported to foreign markets. The cream, also, is of high repute. There are, besides, salt-marshes, producing considerable quantities of salt. The Île de Ré formed part of the dowry of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and on her marriage with Henry the Second passed into the hands of the English.

The steamer stops at St. Martin's, a little town with houses in yellow, brown, and pink stucco, their front doors always wide open, showing an inner garden and trellised vines, making breezy shade at every corner. Some of the houses are handsomely built, and reminded me of a street in Smyrna. There are flowers on the window-sills, flowers in the doorways, flowers on the roof, something to remind you of summer everywhere. The refreshing aspect of St. Martin's does not end here. The town possesses numerous squares, groves, and planted walks of lime and acacia, whilst the country peeps in everywhere. The little port with its pink- and

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LA ROCHELLE

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yellow-walled, green-shuttered houses and trailing vines, reflected in the clear green sea, is a bit of Venice. An artist would call it "malerisch," or paintable.

The Île de Ré is shut off from the outer world by the sea-journey—a pleasant cruise enough on a summer day, but by no means so in winter, when two hours or more of rain, wind, and tossing have to be endured in the transit, which is sometimes, indeed, impracticable. The island is strongly fortified, and the only dreary feature in the scenery is a State prison, in which several hundred political offenders of the Commune were confined, with small chance of escape. Here, too, was placed the unhappy Dreyfus prior to his deportation. In fine weather it is worth while making this little excursion, if only to see La Rochelle from the sea. The exquisitely soft grey walls of the town, the imposing spire of the Lanterne, and the picturesque Tour de la Crosse Horloge, all stand out in bold relief against the bright blue sky. Some way off the harbour rises from the middle of the sea a tall, ominous-looking tower, painted black, and written across in large white letters the memorable name "Richelieu."

It is a place in which you feel at home at once, and quit with regret, this antique, stately, picturesque, most historic La Rochelle.

Les Sables d'Olonne, after this cool city, is as the desert after a delicious oasis. The Vendean watering-place is hot, shadeless, and blinding in cloudless sunshine and burnt-umber levels.

The place is aptly called. Never, I think, saw I

such sands as these—so velvety smooth and firm! This, and the bluest, warmest sea in the world, are enough to account for the great popularity of the little watering-place. But a sojourn at Les Sables in June reminded me of Egypt in May, Algeria in March, and all the hottest places I can remember. There is not a vestige of shade—not a tree, not an inch of wall, not a rock—absolutely nothing to protect the eye and the head from the burning heat and the glare. Yet July and August form the real season, and when I arrived the hotels were crowding fast. The town then consisted of a straggling line of brand-new hotels, and green-shuttered, white-walled villas, mostly of the tiniest dimensions; a new casino and a convent, where ladies are received as boarders at six francs a day during the season, and are made very comfortable. Intervening years have greatly enlarged the place.

The Sablais are a fine, sunburnt, athletic race, and the women, with their bare legs, short red petticoats, black hair, and brownish-red cheeks, are picturesque creatures, especially as they walk arm-in-arm, with a swinging gait, their short, very short red skirts flowing as they go. So great is the heat that during the day—that is to say, from nine o'clock in the morning till five at night—there is nothing to do but remain in your room; but the evenings are cool and delicious. The sands grow golden, the colour of the sea grows an intenser and yet intenser purple, little fishing-boats, with orange-coloured sails, lie at anchor far off; and when I wrote this on almost the longest day of the year, namely, the 26th of June, the night, when at last it did come, hardly seemed

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LES SABLES D'OLONNE

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night at all, so luminous remained the atmosphere.

It is odd that the family bathing-hour here should be from five to seven p.m., yet so it is. Close under the long line of houses fronting the sea stretch long lines of bathing-huts, in which the bathers make their toilet, afterwards walking into the sea, a distance varying with the tide, and, on the evening I speak of, about a quarter of a mile. Next morning, when I looked out of my window at six o'clock, not a soul was taking advantage of the deliciously cool water and solitude.

In spite of the great beauty of the late evenings and early mornings, I cannot conceive of any one staying here during the summer more than twenty-four hours. The hotels are dear, noisy and crowded, the glare unsupportable, and excepting the sea-bathing, no kind of amusement is offered. Yet to this little seaside resort flock thousands and thousands of holiday-makers in the hottest months of the year; many marriages are made by parents and guardians, while the young people are flirting in the water; and so great is the influx of visitors that landlords are able in two months to make up for the deadness of the remaining ten.

Roche-sur-Yon, *chef-lieu* of Vendée, the department formed from the much-romanced province, does not invite a halt, but the pretty little town of Montaigu caresses the wanderer. Amid willowy banks and park-like glades the Maine winds past ancient château and walls, every step recalling historic tragedy. The scenery is gracious, poetic, picturable, recalling Troyon, Daubigny and Corot

in their most natural and idyllic moments. Reaches silvery with sallows, cool streams embrowned by overhanging foliage, low-lying meadows with kine lying in the grass, avenues of lofty poplars or birch opening into lovely little dells. Of these are my memories.

Nor must I forget another feature recorded at the time. My visit to Vendean friends here occurred in the last days of, alas! a far-off June: but never shall I forget the flowering of the vine; from end to end the atmosphere being impregnated with this delicate and indescribable fragrance.

Another and agreeable but wholly unromantic souvenir I carried away from Montaigu—one of the numerous Montaigus throughout France.

Hospitable of the hospitable is the old-fashioned *gentilhomme* of Vendée. In my honour an elaborate *déjeuner*—this meal not as yet called lunch—was given by my hosts, an old Vendean gentleman and his niece, friends and neighbours being called in to partake.

The repast of many choice dishes, accompanied by equally choice wines and liqueurs, began on the stroke of mid-day, and we did not rise from table till the clock was well on its way to *le tantôt*, as our neighbours call the afternoon; that is to say, near four o'clock.

The extraordinary part of the banquet, after all, consisted neither in its luxuriousness nor its length, but in the fact that we all rose from the table every whit as alert and fresh as when we sat down! Ever to be "the worst of the company" was Swift's desire, and such will be the happy lot of the one

English guest of a French social gathering, every one for the stranger's benefit determined to prove witty, amiable and entertaining. When I took leave of my Vendean friends it seemed as if I had spent two months instead of two days at this cordial little town.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PAYS NANTAIS

CERTAIN much-favoured towns, as is the case with certain much-favoured personalities, fail to attract. It is with both a case of—

> "Ah! the little more, how much it is;
> And the little more, and what worlds away!"

Nantes, one would think, must prove magnetic to those in search of a *pays adoptif*, a second and exotic home.

All the resources of an opulent, stately, and most historic capital are here at one's door. Literature, science, learning and the arts are fostered as assiduously as in Paris. A fine opera-house and theatres, museums, libraries, picture-galleries and public gardens, and last, but not least, delightful river-side scenery and an almost southern climate can be enjoyed in the *chef-lieu* of the Loire Inférieure. Wintry weather at Nantes generally means wind and rain, summer heats are tempered by showers and cool grey skies, whilst the mean temperature is so high that tropic plants, oleanders, magnolias, and pomegranate trees flourish out of doors all the year round.

I find in the diary of my twelve months' stay, the

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following note: "March—early this month, camellias are in full bloom in the Jardin des Plantes, also roses, pansies and other flowers."

That year was spent under a French roof, and under the most agreeable and profitable circumstances. But my dear Nantaise friend and hostess having taken up her abode in Paris, I never returned to the great seaport on the Loire.

Although a stroll in the beautiful public garden recalled the tropics, the winter of my sojourn was said to be unusually cold and wet, and with spring rains came an awful inundation.

We were located on the fourth floor of a handsome house in the Place Cambronne, overlooking the Loire as it flowed towards St. Nazaire. Unforgettable was the sight from our windows.

Like a doomed city, Nantes now reared its stately front above the world of waters encompassing it. From the east, from the west they came, till the monotonous, quick-flowing river seemed turned into an ocean. The fairy-like islands in the river's mouth had been gradually disappearing, the trees showing now a lofty summit above the engulphing tides, now a mere arrow-head, on the morrow to show nothing at all. Far down the river side the panorama of pleasant gardens and country villas was undergoing the same transformation, daily and hourly diminishing to view.

In prosperous seasons, there is no more splendid or inspiriting scene than that of the river flowing westward, war-sloops, merchant vessels, and smaller craft crowding its ports, flags of all known nations waving here by turns; to the right, to the left, its

receding banks showing smiling villages and imposing châteaux, their slated roofs and turrets and pinnacles flashing in the sun, countless church spires crowning these, and beyond all the glittering sea.

But "the waters of the flood are upon the earth," and the face of everything was changing. Many a verdant landscape was already hidden by the relentless tides, many others, though as yet only partially submerged, were doomed to the same fate; the sweeps of low-lying pasture close to the river had become one vast lake, the ships that hitherto lined the two miles' length of quay were gathered together in the docks and securely fastened, sprightly little steamers and pleasure-boats ply their busy trade no longer, nothing breaks the solitude of the seething, raging waters but an occasional boat sent perilously to the rescue here and there. The Île de la Gloriette was now hardly recognizable. Its dimpled hillocks, lawny glades, and smiling gardens had all vanished; nothing remained visible but the summits of the poplars and the upper storeys of the farmhouse, its sole habitation.

Such was the bird's-eye view of things from our vantage-ground, but the aspect of the city itself was still more appalling. Suburban gardens, full of roses and chrysanthemums a few days before, were now mere ponds; in many streets, little raised bridges were already erected for pedestrians; shops, dwellings, and warehouses in exposed situations were daily and hourly emptied and abandoned, whole quarters wore the aspect of a plague-stricken place. Every day brought its appalling story of

loss and ruin, and people crowded as anxiously round the newspaper and telegraph offices as in time of war. Now word would be brought of hundreds of drowning cattle, now one village was submerged, now another, all around them rolling the world of waters, the overcharged heavens betokening torrents of rain yet in store, whilst tree-tops, chimneys and spires just rose above the flooded land.

To material interests, also to heroism, were sacrificed many lives, and whole flocks and herds were swept away. The anxious and the morbidly curious flocked to the Morgue, where lay victims awaiting recognition. The pious filled the churches, with tears and murmurs invoking the help of Virgin and patron saint. By way of hastily improvised foot-bridge, canoe and rafts, crowds besieged the Mairie, gazing on the telegrams that arrived from every part. All was consternation, misgiving, and suspense.

Misfortune did not come singly. The partially subsiding floods were followed by a hurricane and final deluge. Only babes and the impotent rested in bed that night. Our own block was a scene of indescribable confusion, each storey emptying its tenants, those on the ground floor no less alarmed than those, like ourselves, higher up. It was a case of water, water everywhere, invading floods below, invading floods above, every imaginable vessel being got out, frantic hands being laid upon any and everything that would hold water, costly vases from the drawing-room now keeping company with wash-tubs and cooking-pots, not a few comic touches relieving the pêle-mêle, hurly-burly, double-

double, toil and trouble, for the nonce, social distinctions, etiquette, conventionalities being lost sight of, everything forgotten but a common danger and suddenly awakened fellowship.

Never did city present a more woeful appearance than did Nantes next day following the inundation. The wind had stripped it of head-covering—literally scalped it from one end to the other—and the shattered slates and tiles lay on the pavement like fallen leaves in autumn. People were rushing hither and thither, with one frantic cry on every lip—"Les couvreurs! les couvreurs!"—"the tilers! the tilers!"—literally, the coverers, a word, doubtless, coined expressly after some such calamity in former days. But the wind still blew fearfully, and heroic tilers, willing to scale the roofs of six-storeyed houses at the peril of their lives, even with prospect of guerdon and glory, did not offer themselves by thousands. Nor was the progress of the dreaded inundation stayed, so that in the distance loomed a far more terrible catastrophe still. Scared and pallid-faced folks were running in all directions, too full of their own concerns to pay much heed to friends and neighbours.

Let us now turn to the seductive side of what Michelet truly calls "le torrent révolutionnaire." The Loire is the paramount attraction of Nantes, and numerous riverside excursions live in my memory. Who, indeed, would choose to travel by road when a water-way is at hand? On Sunday afternoons, with other holiday-makers, we used to take little steamers plying between the city and suburban villages, a delightful way of seeing the

country and country folks. Upon one occasion it was my good fortune to journey with the French Association for the Advancement of Science as far as Couéron—a hundred and thirty-four miles down stream and ten miles within Savenay, blood-red full-stop of the Vendean insurrection. The object of this excursion was to inspect the great State iron foundries of Basse Judre and Couéron, which, however, I will not re-describe here. Fullest particulars of these are, of course, afforded by Joanne and Murray.

The weather was brilliant, and, chatting pleasantly with this acquaintance and that, we enjoyed the quiet scenery of the Loire—low-lying banks which we sometimes seemed nearly to touch, thickly planted with willows and bulrushes and feathery spikes of the rose-pink salicaria amid the green. Sometimes we came suddenly upon a group of village children bathing, who would gaze at us in wondering amazement, or a little garden lying close to the water's edge, with picturesque old women knitting under the thickly-trellised vines, or a company of washerwomen beating their linen under a penthouse. But the banks of the Loire between Nantes and Couéron are monotonous, and as we had no awning to protect us from the sun, we were most thankful to alight. It was a rich and inspiriting experience, and abounding in amenities.

As is the Cherwell—sung by Spenser—to the Thames, so is the Erdre to the Loire. Another red-letter day was one I partly spent on its translucent waves.

At seven o'clock in the morning the little steamer

plying between Nantes and Nort quitted the quay, and we were gliding between the lovely banks so poetically described by Michelet in his preface to *L'Oiseau*. The villa in which he lived and wrote some of his most charming works is pointed out to visitors. "J'allai tant que terre me porta et ne m'arrêtai qu'à Nantes, non loin de la mer, sur une colline qui voit les eaux jaunes de la Bretagne aller joindre dans la Loire les eaux grises de la Vendée. Austère comme devait être la porte de la Bretagne, ce séjour avait la luxuriante verdure du côte Vendéen." He goes on to describe the pomegranates and magnolias in full bloom out of doors, amid which he fancied himself in the south. The banks of the Erdre reminded me of my native Orwell, between Ipswich and Harwich, and in some places of "winding Winandermere, the river lake." On either side are picturesque châteaux and smiling villas, standing in gardens, with richly-wooded hills rising at the back, and emerald lawns and pastures stretching to the water's edge. Firs and pines mingle their dark foliage with birch and chestnut, oak and beech, now yellowing and purpling into autumnal splendour. Here and there are quaint little villages, at each of which we stop and drop or pick up passengers—nuns, priests, peasant folk, and sportsmen; no English or American tourist, no alien but myself.

As we approach Nort the scenery changes, and we find ourselves in a narrow current with sedgy banks, suggestive of wild-fowl shooting, and to right and left, wide solitary stretches of marsh and moor. At the village we alight and take the diligence to

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BELLE ÎLE EN MER, OFF NANTES

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Nozay, driving at a snail's pace through an open country, with farm buildings sparsely scattered amid the waste, and a landscape made up of alternating pasture, wood, and heath, the frequent crucifixes at the roadside reminding us that we are in the most Catholic country in the world. Quitting the crazy mail-coach at Nozay, we traverse an avenue of chestnut-trees, and find ourselves at the handsome lodge of Grand Jouan, where we are most courteously received by the sub-director and a professor. Here, as in the former excursion, my errand was scientific and economic; in other words, a visit to the State Agricultural College, long since transferred to Rennes.

The return from Nort to Nantes was made by moonlight, a glittering yet not too glittering spectacle, the little waves scintillating with silvery light; "an interminable smile," not of ocean, but of a soft flowing, tranquil river.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PAYS ANGEVIN

In tropical July heat, it was with no little sense of relief that I alighted at the station of Les Rosiers, on the line from Saumur to Angers, for a quiet stay in a French country house.

I found my hosts waiting for me at Gennes, reached by omnibus from the railway, and together we climbed the green heights surmounted by the fine old tower of St. Eusèbe. Thence we obtained a superb panorama, the Loire, flowing steely bright, here and there a pretty fishing-boat on its surface, on either side undulations of corn, vineyard and wood. Between the river and the hill just reached, stretched richly cultivated sweeps, parcelled out, the patches making a mosaic of green, purple and gold. Ripe red wheat predominated, intermingled with the paler hued barley and rye, and beds—they were hardly more—of purple beet-root and dark-green hemp; brilliant vines here growing like gooseberry bushes, potato and lucerne in full blossom, and other crops adding to the colour. Everywhere are fruit-trees in superabundant plenty, walnut and service-berry, pear, apple and plum forming avenues along the public way, fruity boulevards in the open! The richness and fertility of such a scene fill the heart with joy, the Loire adding to its beauty.

Extremely curious is the old church of St. Eusèbe, with its Romanesque tower of grey stone—one of many equally interesting in these parts.

A good road, bordered with fruit-trees, and passing through clean, prosperous-looking villages, led to my friend's house, standing in such a garden-full of flowers as I shall never forget. It was not what our French friends call "un jardin lêché," but something much more delightful; namely, a garden without design or plan, and, except for abundant watering, left much to itself; with bits of vegetable-garden and orchard running into the parterres, delightful little corners, all turf and shadow, woods in miniature, green walks shaded by cherry-trees laden with fruit, trellised vines, a tiny rivulet overgrown with loosestrife and willowherb, glimpses of yellow cornfields through all, and flowers in indescribable, royal, distracting abundance everywhere!

Would I could describe them! A chapter, nay, a volume would not do it. Take, for instance, the pinks and carnations, introduced into France by the good King René, here rivalling the rose both in splendour and perfume. Then take the larkspur, a poor creature of a flower with us, banished long ago from rich people's gardens; but how beautiful when seen in perfection, with glorious minarets of delicate blossoms in white, pink, lavender, and deep purple; in fact, a bed of larkspurs is a garden in itself if properly cultivated. Then there is a countless variety of the familiar antirrhinum, brilliant gold and ruby colours predominating, but others in plenty; the bright rose-pink and pure white *belle de nuit*, known to us as marvel of Peru, and to our

American friends as four-o'clock, and roses in great splendour and abundance.

In my friend's garden are hardly any but these old-fashioned flowers; a large variety of sweet-williams, and by no means least, if last mentioned, the exquisitely graceful and poetic cornflower, or *bluet*, here cherished as a garden flower, but chiefly known in England by one variety, that bluest of the blue, *centaurea cyanea*. Here we have cornflowers, white, purple, rose-coloured, or white with just a tinge of shell-like pink, violet, or orange. It is the poet's and the children's flower in France, and you find no garden without it.

Hard as it would be to give any idea of the flowers in this highly favoured country, it would be harder still to describe the quantity and luxuriance of the fruit. Everything flourishes here; and as we stroll from one end of the garden to the other we can pluck such fruit as only rich folks can heap upon their tables in England—mulberries, ripe and luscious; strawberries, raspberries, cherries, gooseberries; in fact, every kind you can think of, with plums, peaches, figs, pears, and grapes ripening as fast as possible to replace all these. The delicious Alpine strawberries called *fraises des quatres saisons* are to be had till November. Then there is almost every vegetable that money can purchase at Covent Garden, artichokes, green peas, all kinds of salads, the *aubergine* or mad apple, unknown with us; salsify also, and *cardon*, a kind of artichoke, both excellent vegetables; none of these in France are luxuries of the rich, but the daily portion of the working classes also. So rich is the soil, and

so splendid the climate, that peasant folk here eat asparagus, green peas, and strawberries every day, as they eat bread and cheese with us, and doubtless find in them much more nourishment than we believe.

The garden, which is in fact a dozen gardens in one, runs all round the house, and on one side is a large clear pond, overshadowed by lofty poplars and acacias; such a pond as Constable would have loved to paint, with delicious play of light and shadow, and meditative cows, always knee-deep in the grass, and glimpses of golden cornfields beyond.

Around on every side we have the same landscape —wide sweeps of ripening harvest-fields and clusters of fruit-trees in their midst, patches of bright green hemp or vine, tall Lombardy poplars and larches making shadows here and there, and above all, wooded hills crowned by church spire or château; everywhere perfume of wild rose and honeysuckle, everywhere the singing of birds.

As a French writer has written of this region, namely, the country of Gennes and neighbourhood, all is antique here, it is one of the most curious portions of Anjou.

The places we visited in our evening drives—the tremendous heat of the day keeping us indoors from eight in the morning till seven at night—were no less interesting than the people. This is a land of dolmens and antiquities. St. George-les-Sept-Voies possesses a curious old church, with a Romanesque tower, and a most beautiful altar-piece, not mentioned that I can discover in any guide-book, but quite a masterpiece. It is carved in wood, and so

thickly covered with gold as to look as if made of gold itself. In the centre compartment is the figure of Christ, the body coloured to represent life, and on each side are two figures of angels, also of wood, and coloured. There is much expression and pathos in these faces, and also grace and skilfulness in the modelling. Underneath are represented the objects connected with the Passion, namely, the crown of thorns, sponge, sword, nails, scourge, manacles, etc. On a level with the figure of the Saviour and the angels are the holy women and the apostles. This curious work of art—the effect of which is splendid in the extreme, the gold being as fresh as if laid on yesterday—is supposed to have been brought from the Abbey of St. Maur or St. Florent le Vieil, but nothing of certainty is known about it. Close to the church is the ancient priory, now inhabited by the curé, in which lived formerly eight monks. The panelled kitchen, handsome Romanesque chimney-piece and ceiling, give evidence of former splendour.

As we drove homeward from St. George, the antiquity and former ecclesiastical riches of the place became more apparent. Here and there are fragments of ruined arch and portico, evidently portions of chapels, and as yet uninjured by time; quaint old farmhouses with slate-roofed towers and turrets, and picturesque dormers. These were before the Revolution most likely monastic institutions. In fact, most of the land hereabouts belonged to the Church up till the time when by virtue of assignats it fell into the hands of the peasants. Occasionally, also, we came upon some majestic menhir standing

in the midst of cornfields or vineyards, the abundance of so-called Druidic monuments forming one of the most curious features of this curious country. One of these, the Pierre couverte de la Bajoulière, is remarkable, and is said to have served as a chapel after 1144, mass being performed there for some nuns who had been driven from their convent by the monks of St. Florent. This dolmen stands in a bit of country as rocky and wild as that of Plougastel in Brittany. The huge blocks of granite lying around reminded me also of Tunbridge Wells, though here the scenery is on a grander scale. The upper part of the dolmen consists of three huge slabs resting upon smaller ones, the whole measuring, I should say, twenty feet. The interior, which has been often searched for treasure, is now choked up with rubbish, and the stones so embedded in the soil as to lose much of their height. But the effect is still striking, and the entourage wild and picturesque, the plain being covered with huge masses of fantastically shaped rock; beyond are views of fair open country, and on one side a row of quaint windmills standing against the clear sky. Windmills are always planted in companies here, and are very characteristic objects of the landscape.

I remember no lovelier pictures of a pastoral kind than those we encountered in our evening drives—rivulets, overshadowed by Corot's trees—silvery poplars and willows—under which cows were resting, or women washing, a shaggy sheep-dog invariably looking on; or we drove along the banks of the cool, grey Loire, with little fishing-boats at anchor far away, close, as it seemed, to the

purple and orange sky; patches of golden corn and ridges of fir and pine clothed the hills; whilst by the road we saw little rustic scenes—here a girl bringing home her sheep, knitting as she goes; there a couple of children coming home from school, whom father had mounted on his plough-horse. Every incident of daily life is poetized by the exquisite atmosphere and the peace and prosperity reigning everywhere. How, indeed, can existence be hard or ugly on a soil so favoured, in a climate so happy?

Those warm July evenings recalled Eastern experiences. Here was the same transparency of light, the same brilliance, if I may so express it, of shadow, the same indescribable lustre, softness, harmony. In my friends' garden the extraordinary luminosity of the atmosphere was especially remarkable. The effect of the glistening white walls against the purple sky could be compared to nothing but Algeria, while so intense was the clearness that the upper leaves of a grove of lime-trees glowed with light as if the moon or sun were shining! Yet there was no moon—only a few stars shone; it was the purity of the air alone that lent such silveriness and luminosity. Again, nothing in England can be compared to the brilliance of the ripe corn here as seen about sunset. The cornfields outside our garden are now veritable floods of amber; we seem at this time of day, in fact, to be living in a golden vapour, in a world where every object is of gold; later on the effect is of pearliness and silveriness, but none the less beautiful. The heat during the day had been tremendous.

I must not forget one curious feature of this landscape—namely, the rock-dwellings. The subterranean habitations reminded me of Virgil's description—

> Ipsi in defossis specubus secura sub alta
> Otia agunt terra, congestaque robora, totasque
> Advolvere focis ulmos, ignique dedere.

The formation is *tuffeau*, or yellow chalk, a soft calcareous stone that easily lends itself to the cutting, and which is commonly used here for building purposes. The rocks are hollowed out into ready-made habitations, and in walking or driving through this curious country we are constantly coming upon a little Troglodyte village. Sometimes we had the back of the houses towards us, and could see nothing of them but tall chimneys rising out of the fields along the roadside; at others we passed the inner side of a cave containing half-a-dozen dwellings, with crops and fruit trees flourishing overhead. Many have no windows, and are only ventilated by chimney and door, but others have smaller ones, and are not uncomfortable looking. Vines and roses are trained on the walls, giving a warm southern look to the scene. We visited several of these caves, and in one found a spinning loom which had been worked there for years. I must say the idea of living and working in the bowels of the earth seemed to me disconcerting, though the darkest and most comfortless of the caves have long ago been abandoned to the animals and farm implements.

The Troglodyte villages are as unlike anything English as can be conceived; but when we get to

the villages themselves, such as St. George-les-Sept-Voies, la Menitré, and others, the neat little cottages, with flower-garden, and newly-constructed villas of middle-class owners, have a familiar aspect; order and tidiness and a look of prosperity we find everywhere.

In some places the scenery is of a different character—for instance, by way of Le Toureil to the banks of the Loire. Here we passed between oak woods and fir ridges, recalling parts of Surrey and Sussex, coming suddenly by a winding descent to a quaint Renaissance church by the river. It was after sunset, and only a rose-pink and golden glow indicated the west. The beauty of the scene on such a night is indescribable—the delicacy and brilliancy of the rainbow-tinted sky, the pearly surface of the Loire, the deep shadows reflected by undulating banks and wooded islets, the distant fishing-boats—here indeed was inspiration for a painter, full of inexpressible poetry, grace and harmony, a thousand sudden gradations of colour making up the whole.

Harvest began during my visits about the middle of July, and, of course, the corn was cut by the sickle, the patches being very small.

The workpeople employed on my friend's property were all catered for on the place, the commissariat and cooking being entrusted to the wife of the *fermier* or farm-bailiff. As the weather was intensely hot, they took their meals out-of-doors; and a merry party they made, consisting of the cook, housemaid, and indoor man-servant, the farmer, his wife and children; besides these, dairy-woman,

stockman, two labourers, a needlewoman, and two lads, making in all fifteen persons who dined and supped under the walnut-trees. And after the long day's toil and the copious repast and equally copious potions of light wine, alike young and old were ready for the dance, their employers and guest footing it merrily on the turf with them by moonlight. Not since those Angevin days have I danced, but in France one's dancing days are never over!

One day we visited an auctioneer, and found the same contradictions so often met with in rural France. On the one hand, very great worldly ease and a certain amount of education—nay, culture; and on the other, the utmost homeliness, I am almost tempted to say, sordidness. Our neighbour was rich in his way, and was doing a good business; he was fond of music, and spent his leisure moments in studying the violin; he loved reading, and had on his shelves Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, Erckmann-Chatrians' novels and other works of a high class, yet he was living the life of a peasant, evidently without higher ambitions. We had gone to purchase some ducks, and meantime a collation was spread for us—wine and preserves, bread-and-butter—for hospitality reigns everywhere, and you no sooner cross the threshold, whether of rich or poor, than you are invited to take some refreshment. After tasting of these good things, we went in search of the ducks, which, however, were too clever to be caught. An old woman-servant, who lived with her employers on terms of perfect equality, vainly put off in a boat on the large pond, and with her blue gown, white cap, and a shaggy dog perched

on the edge, made a picturesque figure. All round the clear, brown water were blue-green sallows, and sedgy banks gay with tall, pink loosestrife and willow-herb; the sky was of deep blue, and between the blue and brown glided the boat, with its picturesque figure and attendant dog. The ducks, wary as rabbits, so successfully hid themselves amid the sedge, that there seemed no prospect of catching them, so we drove off without having accomplished our errand.

This is a land of wild flowers, birds, butterflies and insects. All day long the garden resounds with the notes of warbler and goldfinch, thrush, chaffinch, and many more. No one is allowed to touch them, and there is fruit enough and to spare for all.

At night the humming of insects surpasses anything I remember of the kind. They are invisible, yet the place is alive with them. Combined with the indescribable brilliance and luminosity of these summer nights, such sounds made up fairy-like experiences.

## CHAPTER XIX

### PAYS VENDÉAN, AND BACK TO PARIS

What old traveller will lodge in the heart of a town built on a river?

On the occasion of my first visit to the quiet, elegant, conservative chef-lieu of the Maine and Loire, I arrived thither from Saumur, *en touriste*, putting up at a hotel on the Quay Ligny.

Next morning I beheld a ravishing prospect. The broad, bright Maine flowed close below, its cool, greyish-blue waters broadening towards the verdant Vendée and spanned by three noble bridges, whilst opposite rose spires, domes and towers burnished with the first red and gold of sunrise. The pearliness of the atmosphere, the delicious light and shade, the harmonious outlines, made a perfect picture.

Nor does the city disappoint when visited. Angers covers a small area, and its most remarkable monuments and sites lay in close proximity to each other. But no place for a hurried survey is this richly endowed little capital, and once visited, one longs to return for yet a more intimate acquaintance. Days, nay, weeks may well be devoted to the antiquities, splendid art collections, libraries and museums here—if only travellers can tear themselves from the river! At Angers, as at Nantes,

existence, at least in summer, is nothing if not amphibious. The beautiful Maine, with its pleasure steamers and boats, is a syren—vainly do we stop our ears.

Les Ponts de Cé must be visited by the hastiest. This curious little town, famous in revolutionary history, is also renowned for its pretty maidens and windmills. It is built storey-wise; that is to say, the old part of it lies low down in the Maine valley, and is often under water, whilst the new is built on a much higher level, and offers a refuge to the inhabitants of the former whenever an inundation happens. It is a quaint, old-world place, and as you drive over the bridge you obtain a magnificent view of river, orchards and vineyards, green as emerald shutting in the blue, and far-off villages, with church and château; whilst nearer are overhanging rocks, and rows of windmills perched airily on their summits, like weird, unearthly birds of prey, for a moment at rest with their wings folded in their eyrie. It is impossible, without an artist's pencil, to give any idea of the oddness and mixed comicality and sombreness of such a scene. Do not some landscapes cause us to laugh, just as much as Offenbach's music, or those quaint animals and flowers that seem to have been created for that purpose? The company of windmills of Les Ponts de Cé, solemn as sentinels on their lofty ramparts, mischievous-looking as elves, keeping guard over a fairy realm, pathetic as scarecrows made of heroes' gear and garments, bear no likeness to any spectacle I remember, and would remain in the memory without blood-stained associations. Every spot here-

abouts recalls the Vendéan insurrection, which, poetized into a fervent outburst of loyalty to throne and church, was in reality an organized and universal revolt against the Republican levies; in other words, enforced military service. A legend, assiduously nursed by romancers during the best part of a century, has at last and finally been disproved by historic research.

On one occasion after a stay with my friends in their town-house—all well-to-do French folks are two-housed—I returned to Nantes by the Loire. All travellers should follow this example, but not in the dog days! The heat was tremendous—I am writing of August—a burning sun and cloudless sky, deepening in intensity as the day wore on, and lending a golden hue to the verdant landscape through which we glided so slowly. The banks were bright with mullein, willow-herb, and loosestrife, and sometimes we approached them so nearly that they were almost within arm's length; at others the river widened, on either side rising stately châteaux, feudal ruins, frowning rocks and smiling villages, every stage recalling some legend or incident of the Civil War.

This most delightful journey by water-way might well occupy a week instead of a day.

Here a ruined tower recalls the legend of Barbe-Bleue only yesterday set at naught, stultified in wittiest fashion by Anatole France, there St. Florent invites a halt, not only for its magnificent site, but for the sake of a mausoleum. In its ancient church was buried that noble Vendéan gentleman and soldier, who on his death-bed issued one of the

grandest orders ever breathed by a victorious general in ferocious times: "Grâce aux prisonniers, Bonchamps l'ordonne," four thousand Republicans being thereby rescued from instantaneous slaughter. Not without regret at getting only a bird's-eye view of such scenes, and not without thankfulness, I reached Nantes. The heat, glare and brilliance of an August day in the Loire valley being only comparable to a tropical experience. Not all the riverside verdure, not even the afternoon breeze could give a sense of coolness and refreshment.

At the starting-point these rounds naturally end, but the various routes to Paris taken by me at different times in west central France would of themselves fill a volume.

Memory especially lingers on a certain five hours' journey by diligence through the Vendéan Bocage from Poitiers to Saumur. First we passed wide sweeps of corn, maize and oats, vineyards and long unbroken lines of rich culture. Then the panorama changed, and instead we gazed upon distant forest and woodland, only small patches of pasture or tillage interspersed between barren heath and brushwood.

Parthenay is a very pretty, picturesquely situated town, with woods, water and grey ruins around. No place in Vendée is fuller of historic associations, and at the time of my visit its condition must have been as primitive as in the bloodstained days of the Blancs and the Bleus, no gas in the streets, neither bells, trays, nor modern accommodation in the hotels.

By five o'clock next morning and in sweet summer weather, I was off by the diligence for Bressuire.

It was the hay-making season, and from my seat in the coupé I had delicious scents of hay, honeysuckle and wild rose, whilst on every side were flowers in splendid profusion, amid the crops, corncockle and corn-flower, by the hedgerows wild geraniums, larkspurs, marigolds, salvias, campanulas, and a brilliant rose-pink pea, with foxglove and mullein. Bressuire is a clean, brand-new town, with so many others in Vendée, having been reconstructed on the ruins of the old. It suffered as much as Parthenay during the Civil War; at the time of my visit a ruined château-fort or stronghold still recalling the past.

These modern spick-and-span Vendéan towns, each—at the time I write of—with crumbling tower and walls, appealed strongly to the imagination, bringing home to the least imaginative minds the diabolical aspect of war.

Saumur was reached after five hours' drive through a smiling, delightful, solitary land, no one was abroad but peasants in their fields, men and women busy with sickle and scythe, or occasionally a priest would be seen wending his way to baptism, marriage or burial in some remote village. Madame Dacier's, perhaps I should rather say Eugénie Grandet's home is an elegant little town with pretty white-walled, slate-roofed houses, each standing in its garden, oleanders, magnolias, pomegranates and other tropical flowers filling the borders. The site of Saumur on the Loire is almost as fine as that of Angers, and here the fastidious traveller, with Falstaff, can say, "Shall I not take mine ease at my inn?"

"Fait-on toujours l'amour à Saumur?" runs the dictum. Saumur looks indeed a love-making place, so gay, coquettish and engaging are its suburban streets. Town proper there is none, the country creeping in everywhere, not for a moment can you lose yourself amid roofs and walls. The Cavalry School lends bustle and animation to what was formerly a provincial Athens, and the whilom stronghold of Protestantism is now given up to the manufacture of rosaries! Here, however, the arts are still cultivated. The city of the great Plessis de Mornay, the Daciers—and Eugéne Grandet—possesses metropolitan, artistic, and intellectual resources.

All roads lead to Rome—and Paris. Leisurely travellers in quest of yet more pastoral scenes, may zigzag thither by Niort. From Angers or Saumur it is a step backwards, but well worth the taking. My own visits have been made from other points, but the town is well worth a *détour*, having claims of its own, historic, pictorial, economic.

Arrived at the chef-lieu of the Deux Sèvres, the traveller might fancy himself in a capital, so vast and handsome is its railway station, so teeming with activity are its wide, well-built streets, yet the population numbers twenty thousand and odd souls only. No rags, beggary or uncared-for-ness meet the eye in the pleasant town, charmingly placed on the banks of the Sèvre Nortaise, and surrounded by flower-gardens and richest fruitage. The cultivated spaces on both sides of the river have a warm, southern look; here are huge fir-trees laden with fruit, melons, peaches, nectarines and grapes ripen-

ing in a most ripening sun. Nearly three hundred acres in the neighbourhood are devoted to the delicacy of the Pharaohs; in other words, the onion. This part of La Vendée indeed may be said not only to flavour the soups of Europe, but its wedding cakes. The export of Niort *par excellence* is candied angelica, none other, wherever grown or prepared, attaining equal perfection. There is much sweet pastoral scenery within easy reach of the town. Mules are reared here for the peninsula, and on one farm alone we saw forty young mules of great beauty.

A prettier sight is not to be seen than that of these handsome, carefully tended animals disporting themselves towards sunset, on account of tropical heat, their breathing-time of the day. The celebrated meadow-lands called Belle Isle are then seen at their best. Nothing can be lovelier then than these stretches of velvety pasture, sparkling streams, flowery reaches, and alder trees, all bathed in effulgent gold, all given up to a happy consciousless frisking animal world.

Yet another step backward, and we reach Fontenay-le-Comte, situated on the tiny river Vendée. Never surely since Rubicon has stream so insignificant become so historic! Here, however, the Vendée is navigable, and lends to this small *chef-lieu d'arrondissement*—as we should say, sub-chef-lieu—the bustle of a port.

Formerly precious to the archæologist, from its present aspect we might suppose that Fontenay, like La Roche-sur-Yon, the chef-lieu of the department, had been virtually created, edified, and embellished just because a town was wanted. Far

away from the railway-station, bits of antiquity peep out, reminding us that this most modern place possesses history upon history, is indeed a veritable palimpsest written in stone. The architectural glories of the little Vendéan town have all but disappeared; by way of compensation we see what municipal enterprise can effect in France. Schools, training colleges, museums, libraries, theatres, boulevards, all of a comparatively recent date, here suggest a small city. We may indeed say that since the foundation of the Third Republic the merest townlet has caught a Parisian afflatus.

No matter from what point of the compass Paris is accessible, there a round of French travel naturally ends. Having reached the starting-point, I end this record—to the reader a matter of a few hours only, to the writer, of weeks, months, I may say years of delightful and well-rewarded but laborious wayfaring. There is no short road to a knowledge of France any more than to a knowledge of the French people. Even thirty-five years' study are all too little for such a subject; let others complete a modest beginning!

THE END

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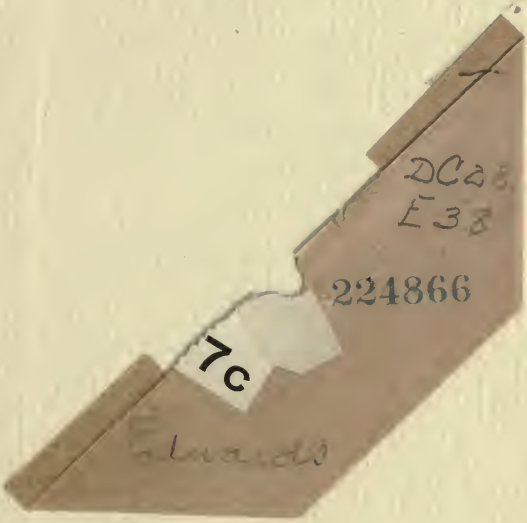
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